

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



May 2018

Vol. 123, No. 5

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

The Genius of Sri Krishna IV

‘[T]he seers call him wise] whose every attempt is free, without any desire for gain, without any selfishness.’ Truth can never come to us as long as we are selfish. We colour everything with our own selves. Things come to us as they are. Not that they are hidden, not at all! We *hide* them. We have the brush. A thing comes, and we do not like it, and we brush a little and then look at it. We do not want to know. We paint everything with ourselves. In all action the motive power is selfishness. Everything is hidden by ourselves. We are like the caterpillar which takes the thread out of his own body and of that makes the cocoon, and behold, he is caught. By his own work he imprisons himself. That is what we are doing. ‘I and mine,’ another turn. So it goes. We cannot remain without action for a moment. Act! But just as when your neighbor asks you, ‘Come and help me!’ have you exactly the same idea when you are helping yourself. No more. Your body is of no more value than that of John. Don’t do anything more for your body than you do for John. That is religion. ‘He whose efforts are bereft of all desire and selfishness has burnt all this bondage of action with the fire of knowledge. He is wise.’ Reading books cannot do that. The ass can be burdened with the whole library; that does not make him learned at all. What is the use of reading



many books? ‘Giving up all attachment to work, always satisfied, not hoping for gain, the wise man acts and is beyond action.’ We go to a medium and see if the ghost can help us. Think of the weakness! Ghosts, devils, gods, anybody—come on! And all the priests, all the charlatans! This is just the time they get hold of us, the moment we are weak. Then they bring in all the gods. Help anyone! But we are helpless. There is no help from anyone. That is the truth. There have been more gods than human beings; and yet no help. We die like dogs—no help. That is the truth. Everywhere beastliness, famine, disease, misery, evil! And all are crying for help. But no help. And yet, hoping against hope, we are still screaming for help. Oh, the miserable condition! It is a tremendous error to feel helpless. Do not seek help from anyone. We are our own help. If we cannot help ourselves, there is none to help us.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 1.463-64.



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PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or AWAKENED INDIA*

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Sri Ramakrishna: Life and Message

Swami Vijnanananda

Translated by Prof. Arun Kumar Biswas

New Releases



Pages: 247 | Price: ₹ 125
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Of all the accounts of the life of Sri Ramakrishna, those written by his disciples who knew and lived with him are the most reliable. This book is an English translation of the Hindi book *Paramahansa Charit*—a biography of the Master written by none other than Swami Vijnanananda. *Paramahansa Charit* has the distinction of being the first Hindi biography of Sri Ramakrishna, as well as the only Hindi biography to be written by one of his disciples. It therefore has great historical significance.

In addition to the life of Sri Ramakrishna and an early compilation of his teachings and parables, the book also contains a short biography of Swami Vijnanananda, his reminiscences of his Master, and a list of early writings on Sri Ramakrishna. Detailed notes and references further enhance the value of the book.

Who is Greater?

Teaching spiritual truths through tales and parables has been very popular with the saints and sages of India since the beginning of time.

Swami Vivekananda was no exception. He was a wonderful story-teller, and his talks and writings are interspersed with numerous anecdotes and illustrations.

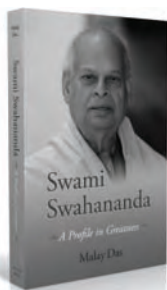
The story “Who Is Greater?” is part of his lectures on Karma Yoga, and has been retold in a lively way in this comic book for children.

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Swami Swahananda: A Profile in Greatness

by Dr. Malay Das



Pages: 234 | Price: ₹ 80
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The spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California for thirty-six years, Swami Swahananda, a direct disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, worked ceaselessly to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message. He established seventeen centers and sub-centers throughout the United States and has left the Ramakrishna movement in the West a rich legacy.

In this intimate, loving portrait, Dr. Malay Das presents Swami Swahananda as he knew him during the last seventeen years of the swami's life. We witness the guru's compassionate care for devotees and disciples, his ability to love with detachment, and his dignity and grace during his final illness.

This book will remind those who knew Swami Swahananda of the ways he touched and left an imprint on their lives. For those readers who did not have the opportunity to meet the swami in person, the book offers them a glimpse into the life and work of this great monk and spiritual teacher.



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An Appeal for Monks' Quarter



Dear Friends,

In 1915, a branch of Ramakrishna Math (Hdq. Belur Math, W. Bengal) was started to cater to the coastal town of Koyilandy in the north Malabar region of Kerala. Since then the Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandi, has been serving in its humble way the fishermen communities who constitute the major populace of the town. Poor housing, sanitation, education facilities, and low income, besides other difficulties make the lives of



these people quite hard and difficult. The Koyilandi centre presently runs a non-formal education centre for 60 deprived children, providing coaching in school subjects along with nutritious food; free distribution of textbooks and scholarships to about 700 poor students and pecuniary aid to the needy; occasional youth camps and cultural programmes for students, and a small library—besides regular puja at the shrine and the observance of sacred days.

To carry on these activities, the monks of the Ashrama need a modestly furnished Monks' Quarter. The present building is much old and beyond repairs. We require Rs.32 lakhs (approx.) to do this. We sincerely seek help from all of you in this respect. All donations to us are exempted from Income Tax u/s 80G of IT Act, 1961.

Account payee cheque or bank draft drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandy' may kindly be sent to us by registered post. Or you may also credit your kind donation through bank transfer (with due intimation to us by email or post) to: For donors in India: Kerala. Bank a/c.no.10632417896 IFS Code:SBIN0003338, SWIFT For donors from abroad: Kerala. Bank a/c.no.10632417921, IFS Code:SBIN0003338 SWIFT



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Wish good wishes and prayers,
Swami Sundarananda
Adhyaksha

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उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राथ वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

May 2018
Vol. 123, No. 5

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथान्यत्राप्युक्तमन्नं वा अस्य सर्वस्य योनिः कालश्चान्नस्य सूर्यो योनिः कालस्य तस्यैतद्रूपं यन्निमेषादिकालात् सम्भृतं द्वादशात्मकं वत्सरमेतस्याग्नेयमर्धमर्धं वारुणं मघाद्यं श्रविष्ठाधर्माग्नेयं क्रमेणोत्क्रमेण सार्पाद्यं श्रविष्ठाधर्मान्तं सौम्यं तत्रैकैकमात्मनो नवांशकं सचारकविधं सौक्ष्म्यत्वादेतत्प्रमाणमनेनैव प्रमीयते हि कालो न विना प्रमाणेन प्रमेयस्योपलब्धिः प्रमेयोऽपि प्रमाणतां पृथक्त्वादुपैत्यात्मसम्बोधनार्थमित्येवं ह्याह । यावत्यो वै कालस्य कलास्तावतीषु चरत्यसौ यः कालं ब्रह्मेत्युपासीत कालस्तस्यातिदूरमपसरतीत्येवं ह्याह । कालात् स्रवन्ति भूतानि कालाद्बृद्धिं प्रयान्ति च । काले चास्तं नियच्छन्ति कालो मूर्तिरमूर्तिमान् ॥

॥ ६.१४ ॥

Athanyatrapy-uktam-annam va asya sarvasya yonih kalash-channasya suryo yonih kalasya tasyaitad-rupam yan-nimeshadi-kalat sambhritam dvadasha-atmakam vatsaram-etasya-agneyam-ardham-ardham varunam magadhyam shravishtha-ardham-agneyam kramenotkramena sarpadyam shravishtha-ardhantam saumyam tatraikaikamatmano navamshakam sacharakavidham saukshmyatvad-etad pramanam anenaiva pramiyate hi kalo na vina pramanena prameyasyopalabdhhi prameyo'pi pramanatam prithaktvad-upaity-atma-sambodhana-artham-ity evam hy-aha. Yavatyo vai kalasya kalas-tavatishu charaty-asau yah kalam brahmety-upasita kalas-tasya-atiduram-apasarati-ity-evam hya-aha. Kalat sravanti bhutani kalad-vridddhim prayanti cha; kale chastam niyacchanti kalo murtir-amurtiman. (6.14)

And thus it has been said elsewhere: Indeed, food is the source of this universe, and time of food, and the sun of time. Time's form is a year, composed of moments and other measures, consisting twelve months. Its one half belongs to Agni, the other to Varuna. The course from *Magha*, the sickle asterism, to half of *Shravishtha*, the drum asterism, belongs to Agni. The course from *Sarpa*, serpent asterism, to half of *Shravishtha* belongs to moon. Among these, each month of the self named as the year includes nine quarters according to the corresponding course of the sun. Because of its subtlety, this is the proof, for time is only thus proven. Without proof there is no apprehension of the object. However, the object might be proven from its parts and by its being self-evident. For it has been said: 'Through the parts of time, the sun moves. Time moves very far from one who worships it as Brahma.' For it has been said: 'From time all beings flow, from time they attain growth; in time they disappear, time is formless and with form.'

(6.14)

THIS MONTH

IS LANGUAGE IMPORTANT in our lives? If yes, which language? What is the role of our mother tongue? Is it important to learn our mother tongue or is it enough if we can just communicate? All these issues are discussed in **Learning the Mother Tongue**.

What does a common person do, and how does one live? What is the purpose in life of such a person? Who is a saint and who is a saviour? Swami Pavitrananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of New York discusses these concepts in **Saint, Saviour, and Common Man**. This is an edited transcript of a talk delivered on 14 March 1954.

When one walks along the sea beach one leaves temporary marks of footsteps on the sand. Soon they are washed off by the incessant waves. However, the great souls walk freely down the corridor of time leaving indelible footmarks which no deluge succeeds in wiping out. Those footprints are followed by posterity through generations to create a new era in history. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were two such pioneers. It will always be benevolent for society to follow in their footsteps unquestioningly. Swami Kritarthananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, takes a retrospect view on Swamiji's ideas about organisation in the article **In Swami Vivekananda's Footsteps**.

We grumble that life is so full of misery because we do not know the art of living in this world. That same framework of illusion can well be the mart of joy. It may sound funny but yet it is true as shown by Swami Satyapriyananda,

Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math in **How to Enjoy the World So Full of Misery**.

Meditations on the Upanishads are the class notes on the Upanishads given on Wednesday evenings by Revered Swami Shraddhananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of Sacramento, in 1979. These class notes were taken down in shorthand in 1979 by Cleo aka Satyamayi Anderson and were transcribed many years later with the help of others. The notes are not verbatim and have been edited by Lali Maly and the second instalment is being given in **Meditations on the Upanishads**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Rishi**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

Even if a person sincerely approaches God for one's wellbeing in this world, that can eventually lead to devotion. This is shown in the second instalment of the story **The Miracle that Brought Faith**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

Bryan Caplan, professor of economics at George Mason University, a blogger, and the author of *Selfish Reasons to Have More Kids* and *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, has written the book **The Case Against Education: Why the Education System is A Waste of Time and Money**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

Learning the Mother Tongue

IS LANGUAGE JUST A means of communication? To reduce language to just a means of communicating information or our thoughts betrays our ignorance about its numerous other dimensions like culture, emotions, identity, personality formation, and so on. Had language been just a means of communication, the human beings would have long found a common language much like the binary zeroes and ones that rule the digital world. However, language is not so simple a phenomenon. Yet, this is the first reply that people give when questioned about their reluctance or inability to learn their mother tongue. It is necessary that we make some things clear at the very beginning of this discussion. No one is arguing here that one should not learn any language other than one's mother tongue. Such an argument would be regressive and would deprive one of the vast amounts of knowledge and creative wisdom that is found in the world languages. Further, it would also seriously hamper one from pursuing different paths of knowledge and career. Also, to properly live in harmony with our fellow human beings in this increasingly shrinking world, we need to learn as many languages as we can. Then, what is this discussion about? It is about the need for learning properly one's own mother tongue, while also learning as many as 'other' tongues because the true tongue that one can have is the mother tongue, rest are other tongues. However, this discussion does not also aim to start a process of creating boundaries by 'othering' tongues and cultures. Though that came as an easy coinage of phrase, 'other'

tongue does not mean a means of differentiation, but it just denotes a tongue that was not of your mother and so is not natural to you.

The true tongue that one person can have is the mother tongue, the rest are other tongues.

The other aspect of this discussion that has to be clarified in the beginning is the phenomenon of one growing up learning the other tongue and not the mother tongue. This has become true with many families now as more and more children are being born outside of their native cultures. As most such children identify more or only with the culture they are born in rather than their native culture, it becomes highly difficult to determine their mother tongue. For instance, a child born of Indian parents, who have become citizens of the US, cannot identify with India as one's nation or motherland. Such a child is brought up in the US and becomes a true citizen of that nation. All that person has as the remnants of Indian-ness is the gatherings at Indian festivals, places of worship, or social events. The nativity is reduced to the mere wearing of clothes and relishing some food. Nonetheless, that child's mother tongue would remain to be the tongue that the native culture spoke simply because millennia of impressions remain hard-wired in the genes and therefore also in the neural circuitry of the child. Mastering any tongue is difficult and takes years of training. However, it is always easier for a child to pick up the nuances of one's mother tongue, even when spoken


in a strange accent and even when practised in a non-native culture.

India is witnessing a very strange phenomenon. Parents are going out of their way to educate their children in English. Now, English education is necessary, and has made Indians fare well on the world scene. But, now Indians are insanely obsessed with English. Parents force their children to speak English just as the British or the Americans do. Recently, a child was seen begging for water at an airport, while the parents insisted that the child asks for water in English. The poor six-year-old struggled to enunciate the right words, under great discomfort of the parched throat. Parents ask the teachers at their child's school to enforce speaking in English and to actually penalise, sometimes even by money, if the child speaks in one's mother tongue or in any Indian language! India is probably the only country in the world where a school-going child has to face punishment for speaking one's mother tongue. One is seen as a person of learning only when one speaks in English, even though most of the time the language that is spoken is not idiomatic, often idiotic, ungrammatical, and largely a transposition of the idioms, phrases, meanings, and nuances of the mother tongue of the speaker. Mannerisms of regional affectations are transplanted into the English speech and what comes out is an unending spree of a volley of words which signify almost nothing to the listener, particularly if the listener is a native speaker.

Every language reflects culture, literature, and popular forms of culture like music, film, and folklore of the native community. Often when one learns a language as the 'other' tongue, one is not given the context or the culture of the language. This happens mainly because to learn a language in all its contexts, one needs a much longer time. Such time is not available to a person, who is learning a language out of some necessity. It could be for work or for education. This time-bound learning

prevents one from going into the nuances of a language and hence what is easily acquired through the family and culture and what is handed down over successive generations regarding the knowledge of mother tongue is unavailable when learning an 'other' tongue. That is why one sees this strange phenomenon. A person born and brought up in a non-native country knows details about one's tradition and folklore much better than the person born and brought up in the native country. This is primarily because of the obsession with learning an 'other' language and culture.

In the Indian context, the root cause of such a phenomenon is the millennia-old slavery that has seeped into the marrows of Indians. There is enough evidence, both in neurology and psychology, to prove that a child picks up on the subtleties of learning a language and also learns to distinguish one's mother tongue from the 'other' tongues at a very early age, primarily due to the natal influence of the mother. Many linguists believe that if one can learn one's mother tongue properly, one can master other languages at a much faster pace and with much greater expertise. Researchers on language acquisition of a child believe that the child learns one's mother tongue easily and quickly as an infant as compared to 'other' tongues. So, the very process of language learning can be highly developed in a child only if she or he learns the mother tongue first. Any child can learn more than one language from the infancy. However, if the child is taught the mother tongue along with the other languages and also with increased emphasis and priority, that child learns all the languages at an amazing pace and with surprising ability.

Though we all should become multilingual, it is imperative that one has a working knowledge of our mother tongues, the only way that our neural networks and minds would cooperate fully with our tongues so that we virtually become master players of the tongue! 

Saint, Saviour, and Common Man

Swami Pavitrananda

Higher and nobler than all ordinary ones are another set of teachers, the Avatars of Ishvara, in the world. They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and most degraded characters become in one second saints at their command. They are Teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestations of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and, indeed, they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship. ...

No man can really see God except through these human manifestations. If we try to see God otherwise, we make for ourselves a hideous caricature of Him, and believe the caricature to be no worse than the original.

There is a story of an ignorant man who was asked to make an image of the God Shiva, and who, after days of hard struggle, manufactured only the image of a monkey. So, whenever we try to think of God as He is in His absolute perfection, we invariably meet with the most miserable failure; because as long as we are men, we cannot conceive God as anything higher than man. The time will come when we shall transcend our human nature, and know Him as He is; but as long as we are men, we must worship Him in man and as man. Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God except as a man.¹

WHAT DOES a 'common man' do, and how does he live? What is his purpose in life? The ordinary man is busy with his struggle for existence. The first and foremost thing in his mind is how to get food, drink, and enjoyment. This is not blameworthy; it is natural. Nietzsche said that before everything

else one must be a healthy animal. Before we can think of higher ideals, we must live, and we must live well.

Even Sri Ramakrishna, who could not touch any material thing such as money, would say, 'You cannot have any higher ideal on an empty stomach.' He would say, 'Such is the insistent demand of the stomach, and if one does not get his meals, even a poet like Kalidasa becomes devoid of all thoughts.' So there is nothing wrong in trying, and trying one's very best to solve the problems of physical existence.

But the difficulty arises when we think that that is all for which a man should live. Some persons solve their problems of physical existence, but still cannot think of higher things. They want more and more; there is no end to their desires.

Well, materialism is as old as philosophy. In every age there were persons who could not think of anything higher than the desire to eat, drink, and be merry. Even in India, in the pre-Buddhistic age, there was a class of persons who would say, 'When you die, you are reduced to ashes; nothing is left of you. So as long as you live; live well, eat well, even by incurring debts, for tomorrow we die.' And they would ridicule persons who talked of any higher philosophy.

Everywhere, in every age, there is epicureanism—poor souls, who cannot think of any higher idea. Some persons, even in their dying moments, think of their bank accounts, or, in India, the money in the chest. They are so attached to these things. Such, the Bhagavadgita

says, will be reborn in an atmosphere congenial to their last thoughts. Poor persons! They are satisfied with animal existence.

Sometimes, people are worse than animals too. Entering into the competition of life, they do not hesitate to push others out for their own aggrandisement. Even if they have enough, they are not satisfied with what they have. They want more and more. At times, we are so bent upon having more, we cannot tolerate any other person. So, from competition comes conflict, and from conflict comes disaster—social, national, international.

We forget how little we need for our physical existence. After all, how much is required for the satisfaction of our human needs, for living a decent human life? All our needs are artificial. Such is the mystery we are caught in—we don't understand it. Everything is artificial, and for that we work and labour hard, and have no rest. We are busy, always busy about what? We have no time even to stop and think what we are doing. Eight hours work in a day are not enough; we are so busy living a hectic life. If we could only look at ourselves objectively; what are these things for?

There is another class of the 'common man'. They have enough, but they want to utilise their surplus energy for, we might say, something higher. So, they devote their time and attention to the pursuit of sciences, literature, and art. These are the fruits of leisure. When persons have leisure, if their minds are refined, if they are noble in their outlook and a little idealistic, they direct their attention to these things, the finer arts. Because there is the joy of creativity; there is great happiness in creative art.

That is the finest joy we can think of in ordinary human existence—to create something, to discover something! The purest joy of a scientist is to increase the frontiers of knowledge, to make a new discovery. It is the same when

one writes good literature, when one can play or create good music, produce painting, and so on. Ordinary persons, satisfied with animal existence, cannot think, but persons belonging to a higher plane of existence, want to have their joy in thoughts, in thinking. It is said that a dog is satisfied with only food. With what gusto it eats food! But man finds joy in thinking new thoughts. And, if he can translate his thoughts into action, he finds greater joy.

But even then, these are within the domain of the sense world. Writing good poetry, or discovering things in science, may give one joy, indeed, the highest joy in the ordinary sense. But for how long? New discoveries do not come every day. A startling discovery is made once or twice in a lifetime, and after that comes an ebb tide. It provides a glimpse of a higher world of joy, but that does not satisfy the whole personality. It gives joy for a time; it does not offer permanent joy. One person wrote to me, so beautifully and touchingly. He had gone on an excursion to a Himalayan region where there was very beautiful scenery. He wrote, 'Yes, I enjoy this scenery, but I ask myself, "How long?" What after that?'

Some persons, therefore, turn their thoughts in another direction, toward higher and higher levels of existence. They have genuine sympathy and fellow feeling. They find joy in serving others, in working for others. That is the highest happiness one can expect to have in ordinary human life. The more you do for others, the more happiness you find. There is no joy within the domain of the senses which can compare with this: to forget oneself and think of the welfare of others.

Yes, but that, also, is not enough. We always say that we must do good to the world. And what is the height of this human ambition? What is meant by 'doing good to the world?' Clearing slums? Having more hospitals and dispensaries?

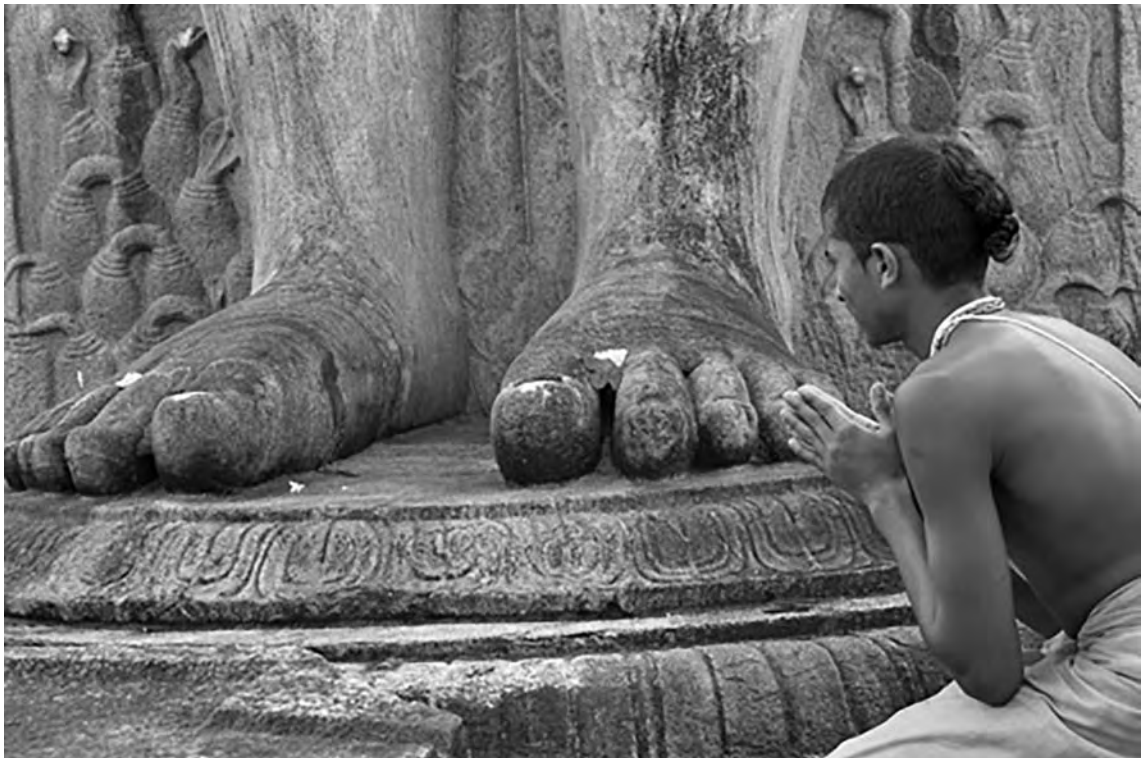
As if hospitals and dispensaries were the signs of civilisation! One person said, 'Don't be so anxious to build hospitals and dispensaries. They are the diseases of civilisation. Why do people go so wrong that there is such need for them? Think of that. Why is it that we need so many hospitals and dispensaries?'

So, the height of human ambition as far as social service is concerned is to clear the slums, to have more hospitals, to provide free education, to have good roads and municipalities, and to provide everyone with a radio or television set. That is the height of human ambition—our social service.

We forget, however, that even a person who has plenty of these things is not happy. He finds there is something lacking within him. He does not know why there come moments when he feels so sad and mentally depressed. What is

he lacking? Sometimes the worst thing comes. Think of persons, very rich persons, so tired of life that they commit suicide. I am not blaming them. Just find out what the reason is; what made them so unhappy? Is it not that they had become tired with the boredom of having enough?

Even doing social service will not suffice. After doing such service, a man will ask himself, 'What has it given me permanently, and what permanent benefit have I done to others?' It is a great benefit, I do not deny that, But in growing higher and higher, one's thinking capacity becomes more persistent and more logical. It may be the last thing, but we must answer the question: Why does a man, having everything turn sad? Why is there sadness in our life in spite of everything. It is the experience of us all. Some persons want to probe that problem, the problem of human existence; and find its solution.



And in delight they think of God, or they create a God. God is created in human image, though it is said God created man in his image. We create God in wanting to know the ultimate Reality, and we find that out only when we pursue spiritual paths. Tired of living an ordinary life within the domain of the senses, wanting something deeper, some pursue that path, the spiritual path, and they do find something; they truly realise. For them it is no longer a striving; it is attaining.

Ordinarily, we strive for an ideal, and we fall short of it. But there must be some persons who reach the goal. Eternal striving indicates that some will reach the end of all striving. Yes, some persons find that. They get in touch with

the ultimate Reality, coming face to face with it. They are the saints. They find joy, and leave an ideal for others.

But here, too, there are saints and saints. Some, finding the goal for which they had been striving, get their own satisfaction, and indirectly do good to the world by leaving an example and ideal. These strive simply for the solution of their own problems. Their capacity is such, but they are not selfish. One cannot say that a scientist, cooped up in his laboratory, is selfish because he does not take part in war, or in voting and politics. One cannot say that an artist is selfish because he does not think of the external world, of what is in the newspapers and the political field. He is satisfied with his brush and canvas. He does something he likes, yet also leaves something for others.

So, even what these persons do, I say, is enough. That is a great boon to humanity; it is not a small thing to leave an ideal. They show that the ideal can be reached in life. That inspires others to follow the same lead, to strive after ideals. If we only knew of an ideal, striving and labouring hard for it, yet not reaching it, it would make us depressed. It would not spur our life, nor give us strength. So, a person who has reached the Ideal is a great blessing to humanity. By reaching the top of Mt Everest, he has shown that we, too, can explore that unexplored region.

But, then, there is another class of beings. One cannot call them ordinary saints. Their whole life is for others. If they do spiritual practices, it is for others, as it were. They are so powerful that they take upon themselves the burden of all humanity. From their lives we find that they lived completely for others, to give eternal peace to all.

These were not ordinary saints. A tree is judged by its fruits. If an ordinary saint can solve only his own problem, these solved the problems

St Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds



PAINTING: GIOTTO / 1297-99 / BASILICA OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, ASSISI, ITALY

of others. They lived for others. Indeed, they waited to solve the problems of humanity. How beautifully Edwin Arnold, in 'The Light of Asia', puts it regarding the life of Buddha. Buddha's problem was: the misery in the universe. He did not think in terms of his personal problem, but in terms of the problem of humanity. Why is there misery in this world? He left the comfort of a palace just to solve that, and when he solved it, the fruit was for all.

The same is true with other saviours, if we may use that expression, 'saviours' not simply to 'save', but to solve the problems of ultimate human existence. They were so great, it even seemed that ordinary saints were too small before them. Think of Christ, and think of St Francis of Assisi. St Francis was great as far as the human ideal is concerned, but he was simply a shadow in comparison with Jesus Christ. Jesus was the model upon which the life of St Francis was built. Jesus, we say, was a saviour, or, in Vedantic language, an incarnation of the godhead.

Vedanta says that God's power descends on earth just to help humanity. There is a song in Bengal addressing God as Divine Mother. It says, 'What is thy play? You throw us into ordeals of fire, and you also come to save us from those ordeals!' Thus are we in this world of misery where we cannot solve our problems by ourselves. However much we seem to solve them, there is something lacking. Some seed of sadness remains, which, we know not when, may grow so big as to upset our whole life. Yes, God has thrown us into this universe, and God also comes as a divine power on this earth to show us how to get out of this riddle.

These incarnations, or, we may say extraordinarily great saints, talk in such a positive way! At times, they declare that they have come to shoulder the burden of humanity, and they say so in very clear, unequivocal terms. 'Come unto

me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'² An ordinary saint does not speak that way. Again, he says, 'I am the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'³ They say it definitely.

Sri Krishna, in the Gita, says the same thing in another language, Sanskrit. He says, 'I admit it is hard to cross this ocean of ignorance, but one who shall follow me, one who will take refuge in me, will be able to cross this ocean. He can go beyond the existence of this ignorance.'⁴

See how definite it is, and it is not egotism. Ordinarily, because we think in human language and cannot rise higher than our own level of thought, we may say that is egotism. But how could a person say, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'? How could one say, 'I admit it is hard to cross this ocean of ignorance, but one who shall follow me, one who will take refuge in me, will be able to cross this ocean.' It is not egotism; it is a fact. They who came as divine power sent on earth, knew it. They knew their mission in life.

Sri Krishna says in the Gita, 'They think that I am only a human form; they do not know me. In their ignorance, therefore, they do not do what I ask them to do.' They neglect me' (9.11). Yes, that has been the experience of all incarnations. In their lifetimes, the incarnations or saviours have been recognised by only a small number of persons, because ordinary persons cannot understand them. It is also said that only those to whom they show their favour can understand them. How can we understand a divine power, we ordinary mortals? We, who are steeped in ignorance, how can we understand a great genius? How can a person who has no learning at all understand good literature? How can one who has no training in art understand a very high work of art? So, it is but natural that

ordinary persons will not understand them. That has been the experience of all incarnations, or divine powers.

But they had so much power. Simply by a touch, by a wish, by a mere look, they could transmit spiritual powers. Swami Vivekananda was I quoted in the introductory passage, had this experience. then he came to his teacher, that teacher did transmit power simply by a touch. There are many cases where he merely looked at a person, and that person had spiritual experiences. These are historical facts. Swamiji was a great personality, you know, but before Sri Ramakrishna he was nothing. Swamiji said, 'Thousands of Vivekanandas may spring forth through one gracious glance of his eyes!'⁵

So, these incarnations are different from ordinary saints. They are different even from great saints. There is a gulf of difference between them. Saints are big, too big for us, yet in God's world, the world of a merciful God, there come persons who are blessings to all humanity.

How can we explain such persons if we judge rationally alone? Were they human beings, or divine powers sent on earth? Why, for instance, did they do spiritual practices? Many of them did tremendous spiritual practices Sri Ramakrishna did so for twelve long years. Buddha passed through a severe asceticism and severe spiritual practices. He ventured his whole life for that, to do or die. 'I must have spiritual realisation in this seat. I shan't arise from it until I do.' How do we explain these things? There is much theological discussion over that problem. If they were divine powers descended on earth, and if they know their divine mission, why did they perform so much spiritual practice? It creates a doubt in our mind, and I do not think we can find a logical answer to it.

It might be that they did spiritual practices as an example for others. Sri Ramakrishna used to say to his disciples, 'I have done sixteen parts, you do one-sixteenth of that.'⁶ Perhaps his disciples would say to others, 'If you do 1/100th part of what we did, that will be enough for you.' It comes that way because ordinary persons cannot do much. But still there is an example, that we should strive our very best. That is the way to strive for spiritual benefit and progress. You must give up and dedicate your whole energy to it, just to leave an example.

We do not know the mystery in God's mind. Why does he expect that we should have spiritual practices and hard labours? If a divine power comes on the earth, why does he not make our life much easier, so that we might attain even without striving? That we do not know. We find that we have to strive. Even when divine powers descend on earth, conscious of their divine mission, even they undergo hard spiritual practices. The indication is that we cannot get a thing for nothing we have to pay a price for it. That is the mystery of God's world. That is the play God is playing in this world.

But what happens is this: When the spiritual practice is finished, so much power is manifested that it is simply amazing. We cannot think that within human form so much power can exist. Think of the whole life we spend to have a little concentration, a little meditation, and such persons can achieve that by a simple touch. We have that example in modern times, even as when Jesus Christ said, 'Be thou whole',⁷ and a man would become whole.

Once, five disciples came to Buddha while he was pursuing his spiritual practices, but they were disappointed with him and left him. Later, after his realisation, when he came to Banaras, that holy city, those disciples met him, and they

could see in the very radiance of His appearance that he had something. Then they could not resist him.

There is so much power in the words of such persons that the world cannot resist them. Even if it resists them for a period, their words have strength which transcends the power of time. With the process of time, larger and larger numbers of persons follow them, getting strength, inspiration, and help from their lives.

Of course, we are liable to commit mistakes. When we read these things, we feel that it is easy; every year some divine power will come on earth. So when persons rise like mushrooms and say they are divine powers descended on earth, many believe them. We are so easily duped. Even in India, when Swamiji went on a tour after his return from America, some persons said, 'Well, here is an incarnation; here is a divine power.' Swamiji, as you know, would not stand nonsense, and he talked vigorously. He asked people to eat nutritious food. He told them that a divine power does not come so easily, and much less will people be able to recognise one.' So don't be duped. Divine powers and incarnations are rare things. They come, history shows, about once in five hundred years.

But it is good to know that perfection can be achieved in human form, or that perfection can be seen in human form. We do not know what a divine incarnation is; we simply state some facts. We find that these are the manifestations, and they are so extraordinarily great that we do not know what to say. This is what Swamiji felt, and other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna would say the same thing. When we see such persons, we think they are the embodiment of God on earth. God is in our imagination as we conceive of some perfection. But now we do find that there is perfection in human forms, existent, visible embodiments of perfection. We worship them as

God because we do not know, we have no idea, what God is, other than a philosophical proposition, or some idea of perfection.

According to the definitions of geometry, a geometrical point is not really existent. We just take for granted the geometrical point or the geometrical circle. It is the same way with God. In our imagination we think of perfection, and when we find visible forms of perfection, we worship them as God, we worship them as saviour.

However, worship or not, one thing is very hopeful. We find that in this human form, one can get perfection. This is extraordinary. Swamiji would say about Sri Ramakrishna that with his own my eyes he could see that in human form one can get perfection.

That is the great thing, that human lives are blessed. If a great person is born in a country, people feel proud that he was born in their country. But here there came a power for humanity, in human form. There lived a soul who reached perfection in his life. Has it not made humanity blessed?

That is enough, hope and strength and consolation to us.

May he guide us; may he protect us;

May he give us understanding and strength,

So that we may be able to realise the highest

Truth.

Peace. Peace. Peace unto us all.



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In Swami Vivekananda's Footsteps

Swami Kritarthananda

Indelible Footprints

WHEN ONE WALKS along the sea beach one leaves temporary marks of footsteps on the sand. Soon they are washed off by the incessant waves. Not so, however, is the case with great souls. They walk freely down the corridor of time leaving indelible footmarks which no deluge succeeds in wiping out. Those footprints are followed by posterity through generations to create a new era in history. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were two such pioneers. It will always be benevolent for society to follow in their footsteps unquestioningly.

The holy twin-organisation of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Sri Ramakrishna and nurtured by Swamiji and his brother-disciples in succession, has covered more than a century, paving its path through thick and thin, facing numerous ordeals and crises. Like the mythological character Bhagiratha bringing in the Ganga from her heavenly abode to the earth for the redemption of many, this organisation has been engaged during this period in making the clarion call to humanity to strive simultaneously for their own liberation and also help others attain it. Thus society has been helped to come out of its cocoon of age-old superstition and mend itself for a better life of understanding and awareness. People in many spheres are learning to stand on their own through a number of effective measures adopted by the monks. This transformation is coming over the people through proper education aimed at restoring the lost confidence in them. Through various projects the Order has

succeeded in alleviating the conditions of the poor and afflicted people in many belts all over India. And the general public has started appreciating its multifarious activities.

As pointed out by Swamiji on several occasions—as also by Swami Saradananda in the first convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission—there are three phases found in the development of a new establishment. These are: opposition, indifference, and acceptance. Swami Saradananda says: ‘It seems to be the invariable rule that every newly started movement should pass through the two stages of opposition and indifference before its principles are accepted by society and humanity at large.’¹ This Order has already overcome the two initial bottlenecks faced by all new organisations in the corridor of time, namely, opposition and indifference. Through the combined honest efforts of the vanguards who were spiritual stalwarts in this organisation, such uphill tasks have been successfully accomplished. And now the third phase—the most important—has appeared before us. It is the phase of acceptance. According to Swamiji this is the most dangerous, and hence critical, period in the progress of an Order. As is seen in our daily life, accidents seldom take place in busy thoroughfares. It is on the highway that a driver often becomes relaxed or slackened in attention, leading to a mishap. This fact also applies to an organisation running on the third phase. As soon as praises are showered on its members, they lose sight of the uphill path ahead of them out of a false sense of security, and thus they get trapped into the mazes

of flattery, and fall into the ditch of their vanity of supremacy over other groups. In the *Kena Upanishad*, the supreme Lord had to appear in disguise before the *devas*—specially qualified persons of higher level—to break off their masks of egoistic revelry when they appropriated to themselves all the credits in overpowering the demons through their own prowess. Each of them tried in succession to burn or blow off a mere piece of straw at the behest of the stranger; but failing miserably in their attempts, they came to senses.² This allegory points to the fact that the spiritual travellers must stop at times to take stock of their real progress.

In view of the above facts, it is highly suggestive to take a retrospect view from time to time, analysing our successes and failures, our actions and reactions in the remote and recent past. A lion in its onward journey sometimes turns back for its own security. From this phenomenon our ancient teachers have coined the word *simha-valokanam* in Sanskrit, meaning, to look back, to have an account of one's credits and defaults. This Sanskrit word is equally applicable to an individual or a group. Without this trait a person runs the risk of turning into a frog in the well.

Enigmatic Personalities of World-Teachers

In the march of time India has seen innumerable world-teachers, men of superhuman characters. It is believed that they come for the redemption of humanity whenever virtue declines and vice rules the roost. But their teachings as also their lives convey such far-reaching messages as are incomprehensible to ordinary minds. Sri Rama is looked upon by the Indians as God incarnate, and yet many of his actions and teachings appear paradoxical. Even his all-time companion Lakshmana felt irritated at his queer behaviour at times. But there was the noble Hanuman who remained ever-obedient to Rama, and never raised

his eyebrows or questioned his acts. And it was this Hanuman who lived to spread the message of Rama long after he left this earth. He was considered the greatest scholar and devotee of all time.

All the more enigmatic was Sri Krishna's character. Even great savants failed to gauge the depth of his personality. So he brought with him Vidura, Uddhava, and a few such souls on whom he conferred the power of understanding his character. Later, the all-renouncing Shukadeva recognised him in the right perspective. While he was narrating the life-story of Sri Krishna to Parikshit, a descendant of the Pandavas, within a short period of seven days, the listener raised the question on the character of Krishna who engaged himself in amorous dance with others' wives on a moonlit night and asked Shukadeva intriguingly: 'What good will it bring to human mind?' Shukadeva gave a significant brief reply which applies to incarnations in all ages and climes: 'In the lives of incarnations some exceptions are also found at times. Yet they are not tainted by the evil effects of such acts, since they are as pure as blazing fire that reduces to ashes everything that falls into it.'³

Like the great incarnations of the Ramayana and Mahabharata era, other great souls also brought with them some persons of extraordinary spiritual achievement to disseminate the messages preached by them. This means that only a great soul can rightly appreciate another great soul. Thus Sri Ramakrishna brought with him Swamiji to fulfil a definite purpose and gave him some instructions in private to that effect. Only a Vivekananda could perceive in the right perspective the vastness and profound nature of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. All others found them very difficult to grasp. A few illustrations are necessary here to clarify this point. Sri Ramakrishna more often than not used to say that the chief aim of human life is to realise God. To emphasise this statement, he said to a close disciple of his:

‘Suppose God appeared before you and said to you, “Accept a boon from Me.” Would you then ask Him, “O God, build me some hospitals and dispensaries?” Or would you not rather pray to Him: “O God, may I have pure love at Your Lotus Feet! May I have Your uninterrupted vision!”?’⁴ Again, on another occasion he said before a covey of devotees in matters of being compassionate to others: ‘You fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, you to show compassion to others! Who are you to show compassion? No, it cannot be. Not compassion for others, but rather the service of man, recognizing him to be a veritable manifestation of God.’⁵ To many this may appear as a highly enigmatic statement, because many questions may crop up from it. ‘Why should one have mercy on others without striving for one’s own liberation, which is the aim of life?’ ‘Will such acts not cause bondages for the aspirant?’ ‘Serving others means subservience to others’ commands; does it not impede spiritual progress?’ ‘When one sees God in others, one becomes identified with God, and no more remains fit to serve God in the afflicted people; and when one goes to serve others without realising God first, there is every chance of being caught up in the mesh of maya. What is the way out of this riddle?’

Swamiji came forward to resolve all the conflicts in this context. He built up a new and unique philosophy on this wonderful statement of Sri Ramakrishna. He showed through irrefutable arguments that the statement can be equally effective both to a spiritual aspirant and a realised soul, and at the same time it also caters to the amelioration of society. So he made this statement the motto of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission: ‘*Atmano mokshartham jagadhitaya cha*; for one’s own liberation and the well-being of the world.’ And this also suggests the way of coordination between the monks and the householders. As it was in ancient times,

both may stretch out their hands and contribute their mites in the welfare of each other.

In implementing this, he felt that the monks must first come out of their age-old ideas of sitting in a cave and spending the whole life in austerity. Sri Ramakrishna bade Swamiji to unite all the energies of the other disciples through an all-embracing love, so that they did not fritter their spiritual energies, and apply themselves wholeheartedly to the welfare of others as a means to their spiritual goal. This was indeed a new concept, of which Sri Ramakrishna was the propagator. He handed over this onerous responsibility to his fittest disciple, Swamiji, who was merged neck-deep in spirituality, and wanted to remain immersed in it forever. But Sri Ramakrishna subdued him with his infinite, incomparable love. Thus a new concept sprouted in a new era in which the monks came out of their closets in forests or mountain caves and employed themselves heart and soul in the service of the poor and afflicted humankind.

The Intriguing Question

After Sri Ramakrishna passed away Swamiji felt an inner urge to know the real India in depth. Many reformers before him had wanted to do the same. But their interest lay in superficial observation, or was based on secondhand information. To know a nation, it is necessary to go to the common masses, to meet them in their shanties and ploughing fields, to love and sympathise with them. In other words, one has to identify oneself with them. Swamiji did exactly that. He being a benevolent monk the common people opened their hearts to him. Thus he went on discovering newer and newer truths of India. The elite of the society were amazed by Swamiji’s extraordinary, all-round talents. At their interest, Swamiji left for the US to speak for Hinduism in the forthcoming Parliament of Religions. Having attained the peak of success he became a world figure. But

all the while the words of his Master kept ringing in his ears. He was fascinated to see the people of that country working with a common interest in an organised way, and remarked to Mrs Lyon of Chicago that he had had the greatest temptation of his life in the US. It was organisation.⁶ Even during his itinerant days in India he observed in some parts of Northwest India a monk serving the poor and the needy with the necessities of their lives all by himself. In mysterious ways he built up schools, hospitals, and group-feeding inns. The scene remained imprinted in Swamiji's mind. In later years he depicted the picture in glowing terms in a letter to his Madras disciples:

The ever-travelling Tyagis of the various orders, Dashanamis or Vairagis or Panthis bring religion to everybody's door, and the cost is only a bit of bread. And how noble and disinterested most of them are! There is one Sannyasin belonging to the Kachu Panthis or independents (who do not identify themselves with any sect) who has been instrumental in the establishing of hundreds of schools and charitable asylums all over Rajputana. He has opened hospitals in forests, and thrown iron bridges over the gorges in the Himalayas, and this man never touches a coin with his hands, has no earthly possession except a blanket, which has given him the nickname of the 'Blanket Swami', and begs his bread from door to door. I have never known him taking a whole dinner from one house, lest it should be a tax on the householder. And he is only one amongst many. Do you think that so long as these Gods on earth live in India and protect the 'Religion Eternal' with the impenetrable rampart of such godly characters, the old religion will die?⁷

Simultaneously the idea assailed him that if a monk without much literary basis can do so much singlehanded, how much more could be done by the well-read monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna by forming themselves into a group? Swamiji's thought on these lines was

much deeper than what he saw outside. His idea was to make people stand on their own through proper training, to be with them in their weal and woe, and to equip them to fight against all onslaughts of poverty and other social evils. He felt that so much selfless service could only be done by the renouncing monks and not by the householders. Then how would the householders get benefited from such a method? Yes, it would be a twofold benefit: They would be spiritually lifted through association with the monks, and in exchange they would contribute their mites in the noble cause to earn the merits of good works. Swamiji expressed this idea laconically in a letter dated 24 January 1894 to his Madras disciples and admirers: 'My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let them know what our forefathers as well as other nations have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now, and then decide. We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallisation would be done by nature according to her laws' (5.29).

With this end in view Swamiji founded the great organisation and named it after his Master, Sri Ramakrishna. On the 1st of May, 1897 before a covey of the householders and monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna he presented the topic in a convincing and significant style:

From my travels in various countries I have come to the conclusion that without organization nothing great and permanent can be done. But in a country like India, at our present stage of development, it does not seem to me well advised to start an organization on a democratic basis in which every member has an equal voice, and decisions are arrived at by a majority of the votes of the community. ... When with the spread of education we learn to

sacrifice, to stand above our individual interests and concerns, for the good of the community or the nation at large, then it will be possible to work on a democratic basis. Taking this into consideration, we should have for our organization at present a Director whose orders everyone should obey. Then, in the fullness of time, it will be guided by the opinion and consent of the members.⁸

Here the second sentence raises a significant question, especially in the Indian context: 'How far are we abreast with other nations in the context of democracy?' This is the first necessary condition Swamiji put before us. To be within the fold of an organisation means to grasp the real meaning of democracy and to practise it. To enjoy the freedom of monastic right does never mean to extract the maximum privileges from it, but to contribute maximum service to the community one belongs to. The moment even a tinge of self-interest creeps into the mind of an individual, it starts destroying his inner system like a virus in a computer.

Swamiji was well aware of all these pitfalls through his extensive experience all over the world. So he wanted the members of this new organisation to be divested of this virus. On the eve of his second departure for the West on 19 June 1899 he addressed the swamis and brahmacharins assembled before him in an inspiring tone:

In our country, the old idea is to sit in a cave and meditate and die. To go ahead of others in salvation is wrong. One must learn sooner or later that one cannot get salvation if one does not try to seek the salvation of his brothers. You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. ... The next thing to remember is that the aim of this institution is to make men. ... You must stand on your own feet. You must have this new method—the method of man-making. The true *man* is he who is strong as strength itself and

yet possesses a woman's heart. You must feel for the millions of beings around you, and yet you must be strong and inflexible and you must also possess obedience; though it may seem a little paradoxical—you must possess these apparently conflicting virtues.⁹

These are some of the ideas of a democratic society. Monks are often heard quoting these lines from the scriptures: '*Nistraigunye pathi vi-charatam ko vidhibh ko nishedhabh*'; for those who tread the path of going beyond the three gunas, where is any injunction or prohibition.' This is generally done with the ulterior motive of avoiding responsibilities or obligations. But ironically, Swamiji preached just the reverse of it. He said that spiritual life begins when one takes up all responsibilities of one's actions on oneself and stops passing the buck to others. Our hoary ancestors have warned us against such falls. Sureshvaracharya, for one, clearly states in his *Nashkarmya-siddhi* that even a realised soul has no right to exercise one's whimsical, unethical desires; and if one does so, one will end up identifying oneself with a dog that eats defiled, impure food.¹⁰ Freedom of monks, especially those belonging to a group, does not imply licence to do anything in any way they like. Instead they must be ready to accept the responsibility for each of their actions.

On Organised Religion

Two contrary ideas intrigued Swamiji during this time. One was the formation of an organisation and the other was the fear of it being reduced to a new sect. Swamiji often used to quote a Sanskrit verse from the *Hitopadesha*, a primer on moral and ethical values for children, which verse means that though glass blades are very tender, they can be twined into a rope which becomes strong enough to hold back a mad elephant.¹¹ Spirituality forms the vital force of Indians, and this force has to be applied in a unified form to

uplift this country. Swamiji had noted that this tremendous energy was not being applied to its fullest potential. In the second place, Swamiji felt on the basis of direct observation that though the monks of India wield tremendous power, this may also lead to greed followed by exploitation after a few generations. Hence a bridge has to be erected between spiritual and secular powers; in other words, he wanted to establish a bridge of mutual bonds between the monks and the householders. With this idea in mind, Swamiji made a very bold statement which may appear contradictory, but after reading between the lines one wonders about the greatness of Swamiji even in points of impartiality. In his lecture entitled *My Life and Mission* delivered in California, he said:

I must tell you that I am not a great believer in monastic systems. They have great merits, and also great defects. There should be a perfect balance between the monastics and the householders. But monasticism has absorbed all the power in India. ... Now, that is bad, so much power, even in the hands of good men—although these monastics have been the bulwark of the people. They stand between priestcraft and knowledge. They are the centres of knowledge and reform. ... But all the same so much power is not good there; better methods should be worked out. ... What we can do is just to transform it, give it another form. This tremendous power in the hands of the roving Sannyasins of India has got to be transformed, and it will raise the masses up.¹²

Now it bears mention in this context that Swamiji said this on 27 January 1900, that is, about two and a half years after founding the Ramakrishna Mission Association on 1 May 1897. Then again, in his lecture on the Bhagavadgita at San Francisco he said:

We start a religion and make a set of dogmas and betray the goal of mankind and treat everyone [as having] the same nature. No two

persons have the same mind or the same body. ... No two persons have the same religion. ... If you want to be religious, enter not the gate of any organised religions. They do a hundred times more evil than good, because they stop the growth of each one's individual development. Study everything, but keep your own seat firm. If you take my advice, do not put your neck into the trap. The moment they try to put their noose on you, get your neck out and go somewhere else. [As] the bee culling honey from many flowers remains free, not bound by any flower, be not bound. ... Enter not the door of any organised religion. [Religion] is only between you and your God, and no third person must come between you (1.473–4).

How can these latter two ideas be reconciled with his act of founding the organisation? Initially, even Swamiji was in a dilemma. So he sought the valued opinion of Nag Mahashay, a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, when the latter came to meet him at Belur Math sometime in the beginning of 1899: 'Is the starting of these Maths and Ashramas etc. a step in the right direction?' And Nag Mahashay, an embodiment of humility that he was, replied with full conviction: 'I am an insignificant being, what do I understand? Whatever you do, I know for a certainty, will conduce to the well-being of the world.' Again Swamiji expressed a dither in regard to all the works he initiated: 'I do not fully understand whether what I am doing is right or not. At particular times I feel a great inclination to work in a certain direction, and I work according to that. Whether it is for good or evil, I cannot understand.' Nag Mahashay's brief reply was: 'Well, Shri Ramakrishna said, "The treasure is now locked."—Therefore he does not let you know fully. The moment you know it, your play of human life will be at an end' (7.187–9).

Framing of Rules

This dialogue reveals to us the fact that Swamiji

was deeply concerned about his moves on these lines. He pondered over the pros and cons of this concept of organised life. His intense experience and knowledge from the pages of history gave him the insight also into the dark side of organised life, which he clearly expressed in the course of another lecture in San Francisco: 'The moment you form yourselves into an organization, you begin to hate everybody outside of that organization. When you join an organization you are putting bonds upon yourself, you are limiting your own freedom. Why should you form yourselves into an order having rules and regulations thus limiting everyone as to his independent action? If one breaks a law of an order or society he is hated by the rest. What right has anyone to lay down rules and laws governing others? Such laws are not laws at all. If it were a law, it could not be broken. The fact that these so-called laws are broken shows clearly they are not laws.'¹³ So, while framing a number of rules for all the members of his newly founded organisation, Swamiji made this point clear to everyone. Those rules stand as sentries to protect every spiritual aspirant belonging to the fold of the Ramakrishna Order, and may be treated as moral codes of conduct like *Manusmriti* and similar other social codes of India. In his letter dated 3 March 1894 to Kidi, a Madras devotee of his, Swamiji wrote explicitly: 'For a religion to be effective, enthusiasm is necessary. At the same time we must try to avoid the danger of multiplying creeds. We avoid that by being a non-sectarian sect, having all the advantages of a sect and the broadness of a universal religion. ... We reject none, neither theist, nor pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic, nor atheist; the only condition of being a disciple is modelling a character at once the broadest and the most intense. Nor do we insist upon particular codes of morality as to conduct, or character, or eating and drinking, except so far as it injures

others.'¹⁴ Further, In order to give a concrete form to this principle, Swamiji jotted down the following mandatory rules for the monastic members, a few of which bear relevance to the present context:

1. 'Know partiality to be the chief cause of all evil. That is to say, if you show towards any one more love than towards somebody else, rest assured, you will be sowing the seeds of future troubles.

2. If anybody comes to you to speak ill of any of his brothers, refuse to listen to him *in toto*. It is a great sin to listen even. In that lies the germ of future troubles.

3. Moreover, bear with everyone's shortcomings. Forgive offences by the million. And if you love all unselfishly, all will by degrees come to love one another. As soon as they fully understand that the interests of one depend upon those of others, every one of them will give up jealousy. To do something conjointly is not in our very national character. Therefore you must try to inaugurate that spirit with the utmost care, and wait patiently' (6.322-3).

4. 'You are all of infinite strength—how long does it take you to keep off jealousy or egoistic ideas? The moment such propensity comes, resign yourselves to the Lord! Just make over your body and mind to His work, and all troubles will be at an end for ever' (ibid.).

5. 'It shall be wholly forbidden to huddle together in a room and chat the whole day away, with any number of outsiders coming and joining in the hubbub. ...

6. 'Tale-bearing, caballing, or reporting scandals about others should be altogether eschewed' (7.492).

Apart from these, Swamiji's instructions come down to us through his advices to intimate friends, disciples, and admirers also. From those instructions one gets a few definitions of real

management and one can also guess Swamiji's intention to protect the members from the evils of an organisation. A few of such advices, strewn in his letters, are appended below:

1. 'Skillful management lies in giving every man work after his own heart.'¹⁵

2. 'The term organisation means division of labour. Each does his own part, and all the parts taken together express an ideal of harmony.'¹⁶

3. 'Take care how you trample on the least rights of others. Many a huge ship has foundered in that whirlpool. Remember, perfect devotion minus its bigotry—this is what we have got to show' (6.285). [Letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda dated 19 March 1894].¹⁷

4. 'As long as the idea of faction will remain, the attitude of disgust towards the disciples of Paramahansa will also linger, the desire to interfere in their work will crop up so long, and the quarrels will only go on increasing.'¹⁸ 'How can one preach the catholic ideas of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and form sects at the same time?'¹⁹

5. 'No one ever succeeded in keeping society in good humour and at the same time did great works. One must work as the dictate comes from within, and then if it is right and good, society is bound to veer round, perhaps centuries after one is dead and gone.'²⁰

6. 'If one does not have interest in a thing he will not work wholeheartedly; all should be made to understand that everyone has a share in the work and property, and a voice in the management. Give a responsible position to everyone alternately with an eye to watch and control; thus only can men be trained for the work. We Indians suffer from a great defect, that is, we cannot make a permanent organisation, and the reason is because we never like to share power with others and never think of what will come after we are gone.'²¹

7. 'We would do nothing ourselves and will

scoff at others who try to do something—this is the bane that has brought about our downfall as a nation. Want of sympathy and lack of enthusiasm are at the root of all misery, and you must therefore give these two up. Who but the Lord knows what potentialities there are in particular individuals—let all have opportunities, and leave the rest to the Lord. It is indeed very difficult to have an equal love for all, but without it there is no Mukti.'²²

8. 'You must not throw cold water on anybody's project. Give up criticism altogether. Help all as long as you find they are doing all right, and in cases where they seem to be going wrong, show them their mistakes gently. It is criticising each other that is at the root of all ruin. That is the secret of breaking down organisations. "What does he know?" "What can you do?"—such comments accompanied by a derisive smile—these are the main causes of all dissensions.'²³

9. 'He who knows how to obey knows how to command. Learn obedience first. Among these Western nations, with such a high spirit of independence, the spirit of obedience is equally strong. We are all of us self-important—which never produces any work. Great enterprise, boundless courage, tremendous energy, and, above all, perfect obedience—these are the only traits that lead to individual and national regeneration. These traits are altogether lacking in us.'²⁴

10. 'Our nation is totally lacking in the faculty of organisation. It is this one drawback which produces all sorts of evil' (6.321). 'Five persons cannot at all join hands together to accomplish a common end.'²⁵ 'The first requisite for organisation is obedience. I do a little bit of work when I feel so disposed, and then let it go to the dogs—this kind of work is of no avail. We must have plodding industry and perseverance.'²⁶

11. 'The only way of getting our divine nature

manifested is by helping others to do the same. If there is inequality in nature, still there must be equal chance for all—or if greater for some and for some less—the weaker should be given more chance than the strong’ (6.319).

12. ‘Know that talking ill of others in private is a sin. You must wholly avoid it. Many things may occur to the mind, but it gradually makes a mountain of a molehill if you try to express them. Everything is ended if you forgive and forget’ (6.304–5).

13. ‘We must not join any sect, but we must sympathise and work with each’ (5.37–8).

14. ‘You will have to take charge of the whole movement, not as a *leader*, but as a *servant*? Do you know, the least show of leading destroys everything by rousing jealousy?’ (5.41).

15. ‘It is not at all necessary that all should have the same faith in our Lord as we have, but we want to unite all the powers of goodness against all the powers of evil’ (6.285).

16. ‘A besetting sin with Sannyasins is the taking pride in their monastic order. ... One must make no distinction between householders and Sannyasins—then only one is a true Sannyasin’ (ibid.).

17. ‘All combined efforts in India sink under the weight of one iniquity—we have not yet developed strict business principles. Business is business, in the highest sense, and no friendship—or as the Hindu proverb says “eye-shame”—should be there. One should keep the clearest account of everything in one’s charge—and never, never apply the funds intended for one thing to any other use whatsoever—even if one starves the next moment. This is business integrity. Next, energy unfailing. Whatever you do let that be your worship for the time’ (5.114).

18. ‘Some people do the best work when *led*. Not every one is *born to lead*. The best leader, however, is one who “leads like the baby”. The

baby, though apparently depending on everyone, is the king of the household. At least, to my thinking, that is the secret. ... It is the power of expressing one’s love and appreciation and sympathy for others, that enables one person to succeed better in spreading the idea than others. ... A leader must be impersonal.’

Thus we have in total twenty-four guiding principles which provide us with the codes of conduct to be followed in the Order, namely, the secret of organised life, the requisite qualification for a leader, the root of able management, and finally, the distinct features of the Ramakrishna Order highlighted by its liberal and broad outlook on other religions, lack of factionalism, jealousy, backbiting, and the like. It is only by following the above guidelines that the Order can be made into ‘a sect without the evils of sectarianism’. Swamiji presented this idea in picturesque style in his lecture entitled ‘The Way to the Realisation of a Universal Religion’:

Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. ... I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. ... Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God’s book finished? ... The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future (2.374).

Leadership, Obedience, and Freedom

Swamiji warned all the members of the Order

against harbouring any desire to lead others: 'Do not try to lead your brethren, but serve them. The brutal mania for leading has sunk many a great ship in the waters of life. Take care especially of that, i.e. be unselfish even unto death, and work' (5.36) He wrote further: 'Do you know, the least show of leading destroys everything by rousing jealousy?' (5.41). This means a perfect leader should be a perfect blend of a lion's courage and a lamb's meekness. In other words, in points of dominating others one should be the last person, humble and meek; but given the responsibility to lead the rank under critical situations, one should bear the brunt of all onslaughts like a lion, the king of the jungle. To make the point further clear, he upheld another burning example from the pages of Indian history, showing the root cause of the failure of Indian soldiers in the Sepoy Mutiny. He jotted it down in a humorous tone:

An English friend of mine, named General Strong, was in India during the Sepoy Mutiny. He used to tell many stories about it. One day, in the course of conversation, I asked him how it was that the sepoys who had enough of guns, ammunition, and provisions at their disposal, and were also trained veterans, came to suffer such a defeat. He replied that the leaders among them, instead of advancing forward, only kept shouting from a safe position in the rear, 'Fight on, brave lads,' and so forth; but unless the commanding officer goes ahead and faces death, the rank and file will never fight with heart. It is the same in every branch. 'A captain must sacrifice his head,' they say.²⁷ If you can lay down your life for a cause, then only you can be a leader. But we all want to be leaders without making the necessary sacrifice. And the result is zero—nobody listens to us!²⁸

Another necessary quality for leadership is strength of character. In his *Raja Yoga* lectures Swamiji pointed out to his students: 'The

majority of sects will be transient, and last only as bubbles because the leaders are not usually men of character. Perfect love, the heart never reacting, this is what builds character. There is no allegiance possible where there is no character in the leader, and perfect purity ensures the most lasting allegiance and confidence' (6.135). Nobody will dare to disobey a leader whose character is made of such noble qualities. Then the very question of obedience will become irrelevant.

We now proceed to discuss at length some salient points upheld by Swamiji in his instructions. A right understanding of them will make one more mature in taking the challenges of a spiritual journey. We have seen in the foregoing paragraphs the repeated mention of the word 'obedience', which is another watchword of organised life. This particular word more often than not becomes the source of all dissension and misgivings among the members of a society or organisation. It is because everywhere—be it a family, society, or an organisation—the seniors, the powerful or resourceful members claim unconditional obedience from the junior members. Obedience can only be followed as long as it does not lower the self-respect or self-dignity of a person. The desire to become free is latent in every individual, and hence no one likes to become a puppet in others' hands in the name of obedience. Especially those whose conscience has awakened a little find it painful to become others' slave. On the other hand, obedience never becomes a source of conflict, nor creates a gulf in mutual relationship where true love finds expression in the dealings among the members. When Swamiji wrote to his brother-disciples such words as, 'The first thing needed is obedience. You must be ready to plunge into fire' (6.322), 'Organisation is power, and the secret of this is obedience' (6.364), what did he actually mean by obedience here? That obedience does

not mean a slavish, unconditional subservience to a particular individual. It is an expression of surrendering one's own whimsical desires to a sublime, noble ideal. A really mature person can become at once 'free as the air, and as obedient as this plant and the dog', as Swamiji put it (3.448).

It is in the name of this very ideal that people assemble under the same banner having thrown overboard all their home and hearth, kith and kin, desires for name and fame, and so on, because even their hearts' blood becomes insignificant, the sacrifice of their lives becomes meaningful, on the altar of that noble ideal. Whenever a large crowd of youth forms into a group centring round a leader, it should be kept in mind that they have surrendered themselves to the *ideal* represented by that person, and not to the *individual* in flesh and blood. Unfortunately, in almost all such cases obedience stands to mean as becoming a puppet in the hands of a leader who is full of power-mongering and selfishness. The phrase 'unconditional obedience' is a slogan raised only by those shrewd leaders. In this context also, Swamiji's comments are worth mention:

If it is finally settled that the path of human welfare is forever chalked out by these omniscient men, society naturally fears its own destruction if the least deviation be made from the boundary line of the path, and so it tries to compel all men through rigid laws and threats of punishment to follow that path with unconditional obedience. If society succeeds in imposing such obedience to itself by confining all men within the narrow groove of these paths, then the destiny of mankind becomes no better than that of a machine. ... In course of time, for want of proper use, all activity is given up, all originality is lost, a sort of Tamasika dreamy lifelessness hovers over the whole nation, and headlong it goes down and down (4.435).

What happens when an individual member of

a society or an organisation surrenders one's aspirations to this so-called obedience? Such a person moves away from one's own soul which, finding no outlet to express its own joyful nature, gives expression to its yearning through anger, malice, antagonism, roguish behaviour, and so on.

Once Mr Leon Landsberg, later Swami Kripananda, an American monastic disciple of Swamiji, wrote a letter to Mrs Sarah Chapman Bull, Dharamata, as Swamiji called her, with some complaints born out of his own misunderstanding of Swamiji in points of obedience. In reply Mrs Bull tersely and unequivocally wrote to him: "Vivekananda asks obedience of his students, only to those *ideals* they voluntarily assume, not to *his* teachings, if I understand him."²⁹ In other words, she vouched for Swamiji's idea of obedience to a principle rather than an individual. The former type helps a person direct his creative genius through proper channel while the latter confines him to a corner and makes him cry inconsolably all his life, and eventually lose his individuality.

One may ask how it is possible to reach a principle without having recourse to an individual. And pat comes Swamiji's reply: 'Obedience and respect cannot be enforced by word of command; neither can they be exacted. It depends upon the man, upon his loving nature and exalted character. None can resist true love and greatness.'³⁰ One whose life is founded on the firm bedrock of love and truth will certainly win the respect and unconditional love of others even unasked; he need not have to impose any rule or command to exact obedience. On the contrary, those who enforce laws in their desperate attempt to keep other members under control by hook or by crook are actually under a sway of mental aberration. People possessed by this attitude evince a strong tendency to destroy their opponents; but they cannot actually

do so in fear of law breathing heavily down their neck. Hence they take recourse to tricky ways of turning their subordinates into slaves. Now, it is as clear as broad daylight that Swamiji was the harbinger of freedom, and hence he cannot preach such personal obedience to people. In his discourse on 'Law and Freedom' Swamiji emphatically said:

I disagree with the idea that freedom is obedience to the laws of nature. I do not understand what it means. According to the history of human progress, it is disobedience to nature that has constituted that progress. It may be said that the conquest of lower laws was through the higher. But even there, the conquering mind was only trying to be free; and as soon as it found that the struggle was also through law, it wanted to conquer that also. So the ideal was freedom in every case. The trees never disobey law. I never saw a cow steal. An oyster never told a lie. Yet they are not greater than man. This life is a tremendous assertion of freedom; and this obedience to law, carried far enough, would make us simply matter—either in society, or in politics, or in religion. Too many laws are a sure sign of death.³¹

In a letter to Swami Brahmananda dated 11 October 1897 Swamiji wrote: 'To me cringing, fawning, whining, degrading inertia and hell are one and the same thing' (8.432). Even in his voyage to the West for the second time, he was delighted to see the crew members, a large number of them Bengalis, working so cheerfully and with an attitude of fearlessness. He wrote in his 'Memoirs': 'Seeing these Bengali lascars, coalmen, servants, and boys at work, the feeling of despair with regard to my countrymen ... was much abated ... how fearless, yet docile! That cringing, sycophant attitude common to "natives" even the sweepers do not possess' (7.325). These lines bear clear evidence that Swamiji never liked cringing, slavish obedience.

Holy Mother on Obedience

And last, but not the least, one feels impelled in this regard to cite the attitude held by the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, the 'Supreme Court' in the words of Swamiji. In her opinion, Obedience to a principle or one's spiritual teacher, guru, can be made unconditional without much trouble. The problem comes when authorised superiors other than the spiritual teacher come in between with all their sophistry to make a slave of the innocent aspirant. Even sometimes the spiritual teacher also, out of one's earthly, base desires, exploits the innocent disciple. One has to be on guard against such atrocities.

Once two American ladies approached the Holy Mother with a significant question: When the spiritual teacher belongs to the opposite sex how far should one obey him in all matters? Now, as a matter of fact, the spiritual teacher of the Holy Mother was none else than her own husband, Sri Ramakrishna. Hence she was never assailed by such a problem in her life. Yet she gave a bold answer: 'In spiritual matters alone you should follow your teacher's instructions unconditionally, but not in worldly matters.' This was a momentous answer that set at naught all scopes of exploitation or manipulation in the name of spiritual ministration. As we gather from her life-story, she would straightaway disobey, refuse, or at least express disapproval of some of the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna on worldly matters wherever they seemed unjustified to her. Once Sri Ramakrishna, a great task master to his monastic disciples in the making, came to know that a disciple had taken two or three extra pieces of bread at supper. This being far beyond what he had earlier stipulated for the disciple; he forbade the Holy Mother Sarada Devi to do so in the future. 'But she was not a person to be ordered around concerning such matters and said to the Master sharply: "Why are

you worrying just because he has eaten two extra pieces of bread? I am looking after these children. I do not want you to criticize them about food.” Reminiscing about such incidents in Dakshineswar, the Holy Mother once said to Yogin-Ma: “Can a person obey every word of another human being?” She did not hesitate to speak the blunt truth to her husband when the occasion demanded it. At one time the kitchen at Kamarpukur badly needed repair and the Master was asked to pay the expense. He said: “We do not live there; let them somehow manage it.” “How selfish!” Sarada Devi said at once.³² On another occasion, when she was asked by Sri Ramakrishna to be a little parsimonious in the matter of giving away things to the devotees, her motherly feeling of charity got hurt. She abruptly left the room, leaving Sri Ramakrishna in great distress at her rigid silence.

Pros and Cons of Organised Life

Organised life has both bright and dark aspects. One of the bright sides is that it helps its members to come out of a crude condition to a substantially cultured and developed state of life through discipline, study, common interest, and mutual love. The members also grow confidence in their abilities by shouldering responsible jobs by degrees. It also enriches the members with a sense of security. Yet there are dark sides of life in organisations against which one has to be careful. In the *first* place, the members of the organisation may mistake the security enjoyed in the Order for a worldly security and start thinking that they may do whatever they like without fear. It is beyond the pale of intelligence of common people to realise that true security comes out of self-surrender to God alone, and not from the support of some of the bullies or powerful members. This Order, as mentioned in the beginning, has already passed through the two initial phases

out of the three, namely, opposition from the public and indifference. Now it is the third phase of acceptance. Among these, the first two are the stages of intense struggle for the aspirants while the third implies progress in a favourable environment. Under this state the members run the greatest risk of losing the battle due to a sense of lethargy, because now the obstruction comes from inside and not outside. This thought was only an echo of Swamiji’s words, which he jotted down in his letter dated 9 July 1895 to the Maharaja of Khetri: ‘Each work has to pass through three stages—ridicule, opposition, and then acceptance. Each man who thinks ahead of his time is sure to be misunderstood. So opposition and persecution are welcome, only I have to be steady and pure and must have immense faith in God, and all these will vanish.’³³

We now come to the *second* dark aspect of organised life. Even an organised spiritual life is nothing but a developed type of social life. Now, the common tendency of every member of a society is to pull down every other member to the average level. It is a commonplace experience of life that crabs are carried to the market for sale in open baskets without any risk of their slipping out. Why? Any crab making an attempt to climb the edge of the basket will be dragged down by the others close behind. So is the plight of every member of a society. They cannot bear to see the progress of any of the fellow brothers in any particular field. Thus all the talents and creative genius get stifled amidst this average way of life. Hence the talented individuals must be on their guard while exercising their creative faculties. An incident during the days of hardship at Baranagar Math may be recalled here as an illustration. At that time, the brother-disciples used to share the household chores among them. One of them was given more to the study of scriptures. This aroused some mild objection from


some of the brothers. When it reached Swamiji's ears, he was touched to the quick. Like a mother eagle saving its chicks with her large wings, he got up and said, 'What harm if one of our brothers spends a little more time after studies? Bring all the vessels to be scoured and cleaned, and I myself shall finish the job in no time.' Such an attitude can at once set at naught all jealousies.

The *third* dark aspect of an organisation is that its members usually look down upon others with a 'holier-than-thou,' 'more competent-than-thou' or such other attitudes. It is very good to develop confidence, but that should not come by lowering others' dignity. One who is well aware of his own capacities and limitations will also have a right assessment of others' good qualities. Such a person will treat others with dignity and, above all, will have full faith in divine dispensation. This proclamation of the Divine Mother should always ring in his ears—'I uplift him whom I wish; I raise him to the status of Brahma, or a seer, or one excelling in talents; I confer power on him.'³⁴ Then such a person will learn to give freedom to others. No idea of power-mongering or envy towards others will find any place in that person's heart. Swamiji wrote in a letter: 'None deserves liberty who is not ready to give liberty.'³⁵ Again: 'Liberty is the first condition of growth. Just as man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, dress, and marriage, and in every other thing, so long as he does not injure others' (4.367–8).

The *fourth* dark side is to ostracise a member out of sheer personal grudge. When uncultured and lowly talented people fail to move apace with their highly talented brethren, they harbour deep malice against the latter, and once such people rise to heights of power in any field, they will spare no pains in cornering the less powerful brothers even by using falsehood or shenanigans.

Jealousy, the Bane of Organised Life

Along with emphasising obedience, Swamiji was also vociferous in denouncing jealousy among the members. He poignantly pointed out that jealousy only betrays one's weakness; it is a ridiculously desperate attempt to highlight oneself at the cost of others. One having full confidence in one's own talents, knowledge, and capacities will never be overpowered by jealousy. This truth is particularly relevant in the context of organised life wherein there is no room for individual preference. No post, however covenant, can remain occupied forever by an individual; to leave the post voluntarily and willingly for others after a certain period indicates a wholesome mental attitude. Swamiji demonstrated this teaching in his own life by resigning from the topmost rank of president of the whole Order to make room for his beloved brother-disciple Swami Brahmananda. And after that event he sent an attendant to the newly ordained president begging for a few petty coins needed to ferry across the Ganga. Even one of the reasons of his giving up the body was to allow smaller personalities to come up and express themselves freely. Smaller plants cannot grow around a huge banyan or a peepul tree. What a sky-high greatness Swamiji had! In a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda, Swamiji expressed his deep concern over this weakness of Indian mind: 'Let all give up party-spirit and jealousy, and unite in action. A universal religion cannot be set up through party faction. ... If all understand one day for one minute that one cannot become great by the mere wish, that he only rises whom He raises, and he falls whom He brings down, then all trouble is at an end. But there is that egotism—hollow in itself, and without the power to move a finger; how ludicrous of it to say, "I won't let anyone rise!" That jealousy, that absence of conjoint action is the very nature of enslaved nations. But we must try to shake it off. The terrible jealousy is characteristic of us' (6.285–6).

Swamiji had foretold that the ideas propagated by the holy organisation will last for fifteen hundred years. With the farsightedness of a seer, he could also see that this Order, in its onward march, will suffer from some setback after a few generations due to the laxity of the members to hold on to its norms. This is but natural. Even Acharya Shankara has vouched for this fact in his introductory commentary to the Gita.³⁶ But Swamiji also foresaw that every downfall is immediately followed by another upheaval. So he gave out to the posterity some practical hints as antidote. One has nothing to fear if one holds on steadfastly to these norms and rules. The choice is one's own. 

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10. See Sureshvaracharya, *Naishkarmya-siddhi*, 4.62: 'Buddhadvaita-satattvasya yatheshtacharanam yadi, shunam tattvadrisham chaiva ko bhedo'shuchibhakshane.'
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22. *Complete Works*, 6.357.
23. *Bani O Rachana*, 7.165.
24. *Complete Works*, 6.349.
25. *Bani O Rachana*, 7.136.
26. *Complete Works*, 6.321.
27. This is an allusion to a Hindi adage: 'Sirdar toh sardar; one can become a leader only if one sacrifices one's head.' The word *sardar* means a leader, and *sir* means the head.
28. *Complete Works*, 7.325-6.
29. *New Discoveries*, 6.254-5.
30. *Life*, 2.569.
31. *Complete Works*, 5.287.
32. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 72-3.
33. *Complete Works*, 5.91.
34. *Devi Sukam*, Rig Veda, 10.8.125: 'Yam kamaye tam tam ugram krinomi tam brahmanam tam rishim tam sumedham.'
35. *Complete Works*, 4.368.
36. 'Dirghena kalena anushtatrrinam kamodbhavat hiyamana-vivekaviijnana-hetukena adhar-mena abhibhuyamane dharme; When, after a long time, dharma became overpowered by adharma (vice), and adharma increased owing to the deterioration of discriminative knowledge, caused by the rise of desire in the minds of the followers (of this dharma).'

How to Enjoy the World So Full of Misery

Swami Satyapriyananda

WE GRUMBLE that life is so full of misery. If I were God, I would have created a better world which, like the heavens I do not remember to have seen, must be full of joy and merriment. This we say because we do not know the art of living in this world. That same *framework of illusion* can well be the *mart of joy* if we know the goal God has set for himself. It may sound funny but yet it is true as the following pages will show. God points out through our lives that only righteousness, truth, morality, justice deserve to live on. Their opposite will give only misery to the perpetrator of those deeds which are against public interest.

God, the Great Dramatist

God is a great dramatist! Girish Chandra Ghosh was ‘the greatest Bengali dramatist of his time, the father of the modern Bengali stage’.¹

On 14 December 1884 Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the Star Theatre on Beadon Street in Kolkata to see a play about the life of the Prahlada of exalted devotion to God. Sri Ramakrishna praised Girish by saying: ‘You have written nice plays’ (677). Girish humbly replied that he merely wrote plays but had assimilated very little. To this Sri Ramakrishna emphatically said: ‘No, you assimilate a great deal. The other day I said to you that no one could sketch a divine character unless he had love of God in his heart. Yes, one needs to assimilate spiritual ideas’ (ibid.). He observed that merely reading books without assimilation was of no use. At this point Girish expressed his desire to give up

the theatre. Then Sri Ramakrishna highlighted the use of the theatrical plays by saying: ‘People will learn much from your plays’ (ibid.). On Sri Ramakrishna being asked how he liked the performance, he said: ‘I found that it was God Himself who was acting the different parts. Those who played the female parts seemed to me the direct embodiments of the Blissful Mother, and the cowherd boys of Goloka the embodiments of Narayana Himself. It was God alone who had become all these’ (678). That is the central truth: ‘It was God alone who had become all these.’

Once Narendranath observed: ‘The whole world is a theatre’ (704). Sri Ramakrishna agreed but pointed out that in some places it was the play of *vidya* maya and in some places that of *avidya* maya. Narendranath however contended that everything was the play of *vidya* maya, and Sri Ramakrishna said that it was the stand of those who have the knowledge of Brahman; to the devotee, ‘who follows the path of divine love, both exist—vidyamaya and avidyamaya’ (705).

The World, A Grand Theatrical Performance

God is the director of the awe-inspiring universal drama. In a drama people on the stage play different roles; they are prepared for it by appropriate dress, painting, decoration, as well as appropriate dialogue. On the stage it is almost impossible to discern who is playing which part. This is achieved with great success if the real person is totally hidden by adequate make-up and the projected person is close to the original character in

the play. Depending on the person, she or he is highly suited to act in a particular role; that person may not fit as adequately in with other roles. God, the master dramatist, directs several dramas simultaneously on the universal stage by the power of veiling the Reality called Brahman and projecting the apparent universe. In addition to this, through these dramas God provides for humanity the opportunity to develop a lofty value system in oneself and in society. Further these dramas provide several rasas, moods or emotions: *Shringara*, love; *hasya*, joy; *adbhuta*, wonder; *shanta*, peace; *raudra*, anger; *vira*, courage; *karuna*, compassion; *bhayanaka*, fear; and *vibhatsa*, disgust. Do we not see this in our daily life?

Sri Ramakrishna acted in dramas and also commented on the dramas which he had witnessed. Herein we pore over some of these to learn a few lessons.

We read in the *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* about the first dawn of the characteristic of enacting in Gadadhar: 'He became more and more adroit in imitating others and showed his originality in various ways. ... Whenever he was told that someone was reading and expounding the Puranas in the village, or that a religious drama was being enacted, he would go there and thus come to know the stories from the scriptures. He would, at the same time, observe very minutely the manner of presentation that appealed most to the audience. His wonderful memory and keen insight were of great help in these matters. From that early age his remarkable power of imitation and an inherent sense of fun helped the lively lad to mimic the peculiar gestures of men and women.'²

Drama Needs Complete Identification with the Role

Once during Mahashivaratri, Gadadhar, later Sri Ramakrishna, and his friends had fasted and

worshipped with intense devotion the great Lord Shiva. Some of them had decided to keep a vigil that night, witnessing a drama depicting the glory of Shiva, to be staged at the house of Sitanath Pyne. 'After finishing the worship of the first quarter, Gadadhar was sitting merged in the contemplation of Siva, when his friends suddenly came and told him that he would have to act the part of Siva and speak a few words ... for, ... the person who usually played that role had suddenly taken ill and was unable to appear. Gadadhar at first declined at first declined on the ground that it would interfere with his worship; but they brushed aside the objection arguing that, if he acted the part of Siva, he would have to think of Him all the time, which was as good as worship' (56). He also understood that it will be in the interest of many who were fasting and had decided to keep vigil the whole night witnessing the drama. Gadadhar therefore agreed and appeared on the stage in the role of Shiva. 'With his make-up of matted hair, Rudraksha beads and ashes, he became so merged in the thought of Siva, that he lost all external consciousness' (ibid.). He continued to be in that state for a long time.

The Versatility of Gadadhar's Talents

When the women of the village 'were free from their household duties, many of them would come to Chandradevi and if they found the boy [Gadadhar] at home, they would sometimes ask him to sing for them or read religious narratives' (62). Gadadhar obliged them accordingly.

This became almost a daily routine. ... Besides reading the Puranas, Gadadhar entertained the women in various other ways. ... As many of the villagers were Vaishnavas, there used to be in their houses readings every evening from the *Bhagavata*, or singing of the praises of the divine Lord. His gift of memory enabled Gadadhar. to remember many of those musical

compositions, plays, songs and hymns to God which he had heard from his childhood. As a special entertainment, one day he would begin a drama; on another sing the songs of Bauls or Kavis; or again sing the praises of the divine Lord. When he enacted a play, he would himself play the various parts, changing his voice to suit each character. If on any occasion he found his mother or any of the women dejected, he would start playing a farce from the plays; or would imitate so well the peculiar manner and gestures of some one in the village known to all of them that they would roar with laughter. Thus Gadadhar exercised an immense influence over the village women (62–3).

Forming A Party of Yatra Players

One day some friends of Gadadhar proposed that they should form a party of Yatra players and requested him to take charge of their training. Gadadhar agreed, but the boys were at first worried about a suitable place where they could undergo that training. Gadadhar 'finally selected

Manikraja's mango grove, and it was settled that every day some of them should absent themselves from school to meet there at the appointed time. ... Under Gadadhar's training the boys learnt by heart their own parts and songs, and the mango grove became the happy scene of the performance of the plays depicting the lives of Sri Ramachandra and Sri Krishna. All the details of each performance had to be arranged by Gadadhar with the aid of his own imagination, and he himself had to act the parts of the principal characters (68).

Sign of Best Enactment

'Once a theatrical troupe in the village was enacting the life of Rama. When Kaikeyi asked Rama to go into exile in the forest, Haladhari's father, who had been watching the performance, sprang up. He went to the actor who played Kaikeyi, crying out, "You wretch!"; and was about to burn the actor's face with a torch.'³ That is the sign of best enactment: to completely identify oneself with the character of the part played in the drama.

Sitanath Pyne's House at Kamarpukur



God as Incarnation is Difficult to Recognise

‘God, incarnating Himself as man, behaves exactly like a man. That is why it is difficult to recognize an Incarnation. When God becomes man, He is exactly like man. He has the same hunger, thirst, disease, grief, and sometimes even fear’ (361). People begin to doubt an incarnation saying can such a one very much like us be God? No way! Sri ‘Rama was stricken with grief for Sita. Krishna carried on His head the shoes and wooden stool of His father Nanda’ (ibid.). There is nothing extraordinary in this.

In the theatre, when an actor comes on the stage in the role of a holy man, he behaves like one, and not like the actor who is taking the part of the king. He plays his own role. Once an impersonator dressed himself as a world-renouncing monk. Pleased with the correctness of his disguise, some rich people offered him a rupee. He did not accept the money but went away shaking his head. Afterwards he removed his disguise and appeared in his usual dress. Then he said to the rich people, ‘Please give me the rupee.’ They replied: ‘Why, you went away refusing our present.

Why do you ask for it now?’ The man said: ‘But then I was in the role of a holy man. I could not accept money.’ Likewise, when God becomes man He behaves exactly like a man (ibid.).

The Audience Identifying with the Actor on Stage

A *kathak* was reciting from the Bhagavata when Sri Ramakrishna arrived. ‘The kathak was in the midst of the story of King Harischandra, ... the embodiment of generosity. No one ever went away from him empty-handed’ (226). To test the king’s charity, the sage Vishvamitra extracted from him a promise to grant any boon that he might ask. Then the sage asked for the gift of the kingdom of which Harischandra was king. The king gave away his kingdom. Then Vishvamitra demanded the auxiliary fee, which alone makes charity valid and meritorious! Vishvamitra said: ‘O King, you have given away the entire kingdom. You cannot claim any place here. But you may live in Benares, which belongs to Lord Shiva. I shall lead you there with your wife Shaibya, and your son Rohitasva. There you can procure the auxiliary fee that you owe me.’

Manikraja's Garden at Kamarpukur



‘The royal family, accompanied by the sage, reached Benares and visited the temple of Siva. ... The king could not procure the fee and was compelled to sell Saibya, his royal consort, to a brahmin. With her went Prince Rohitasva. ... Harischandra sold himself to an untouchable who kept a cremation ground. He was ordered to supervise the cremations’ (ibid.). One day, Prince Rohitasva died being bitten by a venomous snake. The cruel brahmin gave no help to the poor mother to cremate the body. The night was dark and stormy.

Saibya started for the cremation ground alone, carrying the body of her son in her arms. Smitten with fear and overpowered with grief, the queen filled heaven and earth with her wailing. Arriving at the cremation ground, she did not recognize her husband, who demanded the usual fee for the cremation. Saibya was penniless and wept bitterly at her unending misfortunes. The impenetrable darkness was illumined only by the terrible flames of the cremation pyres. Above her the thunder roared, and before her the uncouth guardian of the cremation ground demanded his fee. She who had once been queen of the world sat there with her only child dead and cold on her lap.

The devotees burst into tears and loudly lamented this tragic episode of a royal life. And what was the Master doing? He was listening to the recital with rapt attention. Tear-drops appeared in his eyes and he wiped them away.

The kathak continued: When the queen, wailing bitterly, uttered the name of her husband, Harischandra at once recognized his wife and son. Then the two wept for the dead prince. Yet in all these misfortunes the king never once uttered a word of regret for his charity. Finally the sage Viswamitra appeared and told them that he had only wanted to put the king’s charitable impulses to a crucial test. Then, through his spiritual power, the sage brought the prince back to life and returned to the king his lost kingdom (227).

This is the thing to note in this drama: The audience including Sri Ramakrishna ‘burst into

tears and loudly lamented this tragic episode of a royal life’.

‘The performance [of Pahlada] began. Pahlada was seen entering the schoolroom as a student. At the sight of him Sri Ramakrishna uttered once or twice the word “Pahlada” and went into samadhi. During another scene Sri Ramakrishna wept to see Pahlada under an elephant’s feet. He cried when the boy was thrown into the fire’ (677). This identification with the character in the play is worthy of note.

What to Avoid Through Discrimination

After the drama ‘Pahlada’, Girish asked Sri Ramakrishna: ‘Would you care to see the farce, *Vivaha Vibhrata* [The Confusion of Marriage]?’ (677). Sri Ramakrishna gave the pointed reply: ‘Oh, no! Why something like that after the life of Pahlada? I once said to the leader of a theatrical troupe, “End your performance with some religious talk.” We have been listening to such wonderful spiritual conversation; and now to see “The Confusion of Marriage”! A worldly topic!’ (677–8).

Funny Snippets

One comes across repeats of the same scenes in many dramas! These are made into a video form and pasted wherever needed. In this section we see a few such snippets highlighted by Sri Ramakrishna revealing his dramatic bent of mind.

Sri Ramakrishna ‘was seated on the small couch and was doing funny imitations of a kirtani, dressed lavishly and covered with ornaments. She sings, standing on the floor, a coloured kerchief in her hand. Now and then she coughs to draw people’s attention and blows her nose, raising her nose-ring. When a respectable gentleman enters the room she welcomes him with appropriate words, still continuing her song. Now and then she pulls her sari from her arms to show off her jewels’ (717).

'Many women make a show of grief. Knowing beforehand that they will have to weep, they first take off their nose-rings and other ornaments, put them securely in a box, and lock it. Then they fall on the ground and weep, "O friends, what has befallen us?"' (771).

Spiritual Snippets

A guru said to his disciple: 'The world is illusory. Come away with me.' 'But, revered sir,' said the disciple, 'my people at home ... love me so much. How can I give them up?' The guru said: 'No doubt you now have this feeling of "I" and "mine" and say that they love you; but this is all an illusion of your mind. I shall teach you a trick, and you will know whether they love you truly or not.' Saying this, the teacher gave the disciple a pill and said to him: 'Swallow this at home. You will appear to be a corpse, but you will not lose consciousness. You will see everything and hear everything. Then I shall come to your house and gradually you will regain your normal state.' The disciple followed the teacher's instructions and lay on his bed like a dead person. The house was filled with loud wailing. ... Just then a brahmin entered the house and said to them, 'What is the matter with you?' 'This boy is dead,' they replied. The brahmin felt his pulse and said: 'How is that? No, he is not dead. I have a medicine for him that will cure him completely.' The joy of the relatives was unbounded ... 'But,' said the brahmin, '... Another person must take some of this medicine first, and then the boy must swallow the rest. But the other person will die. I see he has so many dear relatives here; one of them will certainly agree to take the medicine. ...' At once the weeping stopped and all sat quiet. The mother said: 'Well, this is a big family. Suppose I die; then who will look after the family?' ... The wife, who had been crying a minute before and bemoaning her ill luck, said: 'Well, he has gone the way of mortals. I have these two or three young children. Who will look after them if I die?' The disciple saw everything and

heard everything. He stood at once up and said to the teacher: 'Let us go, revered sir. I will follow you.' ...

Another disciple said to his teacher: 'Revered sir, my wife takes great care of me. It is for her sake that I cannot give up the world.' The disciple practised hathayoga. The teacher taught him, too, a trick to test his wife's love. One day there was a great wailing in his house. The neighbours came running and saw the hathayogi seated in a posture, his limbs paralysed and distorted. They thought he was dead. His wife fell on the ground, weeping piteously: 'Oh, what has befallen me? How have you provided for our future? Oh, friends, I never dreamt I should meet such a fate!' In the mean time the relatives and friends had brought a cot to take the corpse out. Since the body was twisted and stiff, it could not be taken out through the door. A neighbour quickly brought an axe and began to chop away the door-frame. The wife was crying bitterly, when she heard the sound of the axe. She ran to the door. 'What are you doing, friends?' she asked, still weeping. The neighbour said, 'We can't take the body out; so we are chopping away the door-frame.' 'Please,' said the wife, 'don't do any such thing. I am a widow now; I have no one to look after me. I have to bring up these young children. If you destroy this door, I shall not be able to replace it. Friends, death is inevitable for all, and my husband cannot be called back to life. You had better cut his limbs.' The hathayogi at once stood up. The effect of the medicine had worn off. He said to his wife: 'You evil one! You want to cut off my hands and feet, do you?' So saying, he renounced home and followed his teacher (770-1).

God, the Great Magician

'The magician alone is real; his magic is illusory' (179). Sri Ramakrishna often used magician and his magic as an illustration in spiritual life:

Once a king asked a yogi to impart Knowledge to him in one word. The yogi said, 'All right;

you will get Knowledge in one word.' After a while a magician came to the king. The king saw the magician moving two of his fingers rapidly and heard him exclaim, 'Behold, O King! Behold.' The king looked at him in amazement when, after a few minutes, he saw the two fingers becoming one. The magician moved that one finger rapidly and said, 'Behold, O King! Behold.' The implication of the story is that Brahman and the Primal Energy at first appear to be two. But after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman one does not see the two. Then there is no differentiation; it is One, without a second—Advaita—non-duality (242).

The magician 'takes a string with many knots, and ties one end to something, keeping the other in his hand. Then he shakes the string once or twice, and immediately all the knots come undone. But another man cannot untie the knots however he may try. All the knots of ignorance come undone in the twinkling of an eye, through the guru's grace' (298).

Sri Ramakrishna presented the following Vedantic reasoning. 'A magician came to a king to show his magic. When the magician moved away a little, the king saw a rider on horseback approaching him. He was brilliantly arrayed and had various weapons in his hands. The king and the audience began to reason out what was real in the phenomenon before them. ... At last they found out that the rider alone was there. The significance of this is that Brahman alone is real and the world unreal. Nothing whatsoever remains if you analyse' (854).

Magician or His Magic

Mahendra Nath Gupta asked Sri Ramakrishna a question: 'Does a man watching magic really feel compassion when he sees suffering in the performance?' (460). Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'A jnani sees ... that vidyamaya, avidyamaya, the universe, and all living beings exist and at the

same time do not exist. As long as he is conscious of "I", he is conscious of "others" too. Nothing whatsoever exists after he cuts through the whole thing with the sword of jnana. Then even his "I" becomes as unreal as the magic of the magician. ... You may feel a thousand times that it is all magic; but you are still under the control of the Divine Mother. ... You must do what She makes you do. A man attains Brahmajnana only when it is given to him by the ... Divine Mother. Then alone does he see the whole thing as magic; otherwise not' (ibid.).

Conclusion

If one understands this world phenomenon as a grand drama, a grand play, in which we are all players, we will not get so seriously involved in it and will truly enjoy this play, just as a spectator who, without taking sides, witnesses a football match enjoying both the teams. There is also the magician's role in God's play, presenting the Real to which belong *both* change and changelessness. We must learn the technique of de-linking the magician from the magic, and see the magician in the magic, and as long as the ego persists, we should try to alleviate grief from the lives of others. As Swamiji said: 'Dream no more ... Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams / Which are Love Eternal and Service Free.'⁴



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Meditation on the Upanishads

Swami Shraddhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Class 4: The Five Koshas, Walls of the Self

THIS CREATED UNIVERSE brings so many questions to our mind. The Upanishads are trying to give us an explanation, but really there is only one reality and that is Brahman.

For the time being, let us say that creation is real, but it is all coming from Brahman. Time and again the Upanishad says that for a spiritual aspirant seeking freedom, do not take this story of creation too seriously. This story is only to satisfy the mind. The mind is a tool of maya, the power of delusion, and it always wants to know, ‘What is this? What is that?’ One day the mind will die, and the fire of knowledge will burn the mind.

In the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, Brahman became *akasha*, space-time. Brahman permeates *akasha*. Brahman is so clever and has entered into every fragment of this universe. Due to our ignorance, we do not find Brahman. We should never lose sight of this fundamental proposition: Brahman is reality. If we remember this, then it will be easy for us to find Brahman anywhere. *Adhyasa*, superimposition, is like mistaking the rope for the snake or the water mirage on the highway. Everything is superimposed on Brahman. This is the outlook of Vedanta and a spiritual seeker has to remember it.

Srishthi, sthiti, laya—creation, preservation, and dissolution—are three processes that are constantly going on. When we reach Brahman, we will say, ‘There was never anything but Brahman,’ just as the snake disappears into the rope

or the mirage blends into the road. We are seeking the truth and we must remember that our problems are not real. Let us remember that all this is Brahman.

Now in this verse, man has come. Man is important because we have to start from where we stand. *Adhyasa*, superimposition, is one part, and the other is the return process, *apavada*, dissolution—the removal of that mistake. Step by step through Vedantic reasoning, we reduce the gross into the fine. Man has five coverings—the *panchamaya kosha*—the five walls of the Self: body, life force, mind, ego, and bliss. The innermost core is the pure Self, but due to ignorance that maya is there. Through Vedantic analysis, these five gross sheaths will be removed. This solid body will merge into prana, the life force. Then prana merges into mind. The mind is merged into the ego and that into bliss.

On the cosmic scale, the gross earth has to be liquefied into water, and then vapour into space, and then finally, the *akasha* has to merge into that pure consciousness, namely Brahman. *Brahmagni*, the fire of knowledge, can step by step melt this vast universe into pure consciousness. In the same way, this body has to merge into subtler and subtler ideas.

The Sankhya philosophy, one of the six systems of Indian thought, says that *prakriti*, nature, is binding us, but also is ready to liberate us. This living body is a lump of *prakriti*. This body is continually binding, frightening, and covering us. It is called *annamaya kosha* because

it is made and sustained by *anna*, food and *rasa*, drink, from Mother Earth.

The first kosha or sheath—this body—is a great granite wall. We have to break this wall. We have to get out. Try to remember that it is Brahman that is appearing as the body. Brahman is a very clever player and has entered into this body. Go to the spiritual truth of the body and remember that Brahman has penetrated this body and is inside. There are many spiritual practices to assist us. The fire of knowledge will burn this body. This body is a superimposition on that infinite consciousness. Remember this. We have to discover the pure consciousness within this body.

This body is a food sheath coming from Mother Earth. Think of the millions of bodies—all kinds of creatures, all the living bodies—and think of their composition. Each body is made up of food from Mother Earth. Indeed, this earth is our mother. When we think of this, the idea of unity comes. Our body-consciousness is no longer related to just this one body. In this Vedantic contemplation we cannot ignore this basic truth: this body is made of Mother Earth, as are all bodies. Normally we think only of our little body. That idea will lead us to bondage and attachment. We need to find the way to be liberated from this body. So it is true to say that we are part of all bodies. It is an understatement to say we are only this little body.

In Vedantic contemplation, we have to extend our body to *all* living bodies. Be one with the totality of all bodies. Some bodies are eating dog food, some are sleeping, some are sick. We must try to extend our body further and further, all the way to Kansas, to Europe, to the depths of the oceans. Do this at the time of meditation. We are going to affect this miracle of liberation by knowledge. In this cosmic meditation, we must feel our identity with all living bodies. We have a right to say, 'I am one with Mother

Earth.' This is enlarging our body sense. We have to know that even as a gross body, we are universal. This gives us the capacity of grasping the truth of the Self.

When our mind is totally caught by this little body, it is difficult to reach that vast Brahman. We must tell ourselves, 'I am the totality of all the gross bodies. All living beings come from Mother Earth and eventually go to Mother Earth.' When our body-consciousness is thus expanded, it becomes a means of higher knowledge. This is one technique.

There are times when we do not enjoy our body. Sometimes there is sickness. When we grow old and the teeth shake, when the digestion is slow, the joints are aching, we think, 'Oh, this body is not a means of joy any more.' Still we cling to our body. If one knows that the basic existence is our existence, then we know Brahman. If we are too much attached to our body, then this truth is not for us. There are and have been so many bodies. The attachment to the little has to go. Then we can go to the vast. In this way, we feel the burden of our body.

The second meditation technique is to think that we are a small part of this material universe, not merely of Mother Earth, but a part of this whole cosmos. Above our head there is the vast space and all the stars. Feel that the body is just one speck of all the matter and energy combined into the universe. We have the right to assert our claim and say, 'I am a part of this universe'.

Next, we say, 'I am home.' This little body is trying to feel that the whole universe is its home. Think that the body is the whole cosmos. Bring the sun to our right eye and the moon to our head. Our arms have been stretched to the heavens and Mother Earth is our feet. Imagine a cosmic body. Our body-consciousness has to be transferred into a cosmic consciousness. The physical sheath has become the whole universe.

We must try to find the continuity from our body to the sun and the moon. Raise your body-consciousness to the cosmic level.

The purpose of these contemplations is to expand our body sense. If we allow ourselves to remain inside this little body, it is too much bondage. These are techniques to try to break down this first wall. The final wall will be broken when knowledge comes. Even though we function in ignorance, it is not difficult to practise these contemplations.

Class 5: The Annamaya Kosha

The first covering of the Self, namely the *annamaya kosha*—the covering that consists of food—is our gross body. In order to remove this covering we must consider our body as just one unit among millions of bodies. This awareness itself will bring down the body-consciousness. If there is one professor who is a Nobel Laureate, then everyone thinks it is something special. But if there are seven of them on campus, then being a Nobel Laureate is not so outstanding.

Another technique to lessen our body-consciousness is to consider that the material of our body is made of Mother Earth. All the food we eat and that all bodies eat comes from Mother Earth.

In the Upanishads, there are meditations to help us in this understanding. One such meditation is to think that a wave in the ocean could say, ‘Oh, I am a wave’. Or instead, one could think, ‘I am a part of this vast ocean’. To think we are a part of Mother Earth broadens our sense of identity.

There are other more difficult techniques. First, contemplate on the body and think, ‘What is happening?’ In other words, be aware that the eyes are seeing, the ears are hearing, the heart is beating, the stomach is digesting. Watch and observe. Do not say, ‘I am seeing’. Say instead,

‘The eyes are seeing’. Transfer the actions to the different parts of the body. This analysis becomes more meaningful as we proceed and begin to have a glimpse of ourselves as the soul. In other words, this analysis is leading us to the knowledge that the Self as consciousness is the true perceiver. In the Bhagavadgita, it is said that the knower of truth should think that, ‘whatever is happening with this body is separate from my true Self’.¹ In these Gita verses, it is said that the different organs are functioning, but only the senses are in contact with their objects. A seeker of Self-knowledge should practise this technique by thinking: ‘I shall examine this first wall that is covering my true Self.’ These thoughts lead to a sense of detachment.

In the next technique we must have some faith in our true nature. Namely, we need to think, ‘My true nature is really the unbroken, undying core of existence. Somehow, I have been captured in and captivated by this body. So, let this body be a friend.’

The Upanishads begin with invocations—verses that give the idea of each organ in the body being governed by the cosmic deities, such as the sun and the moon. This is a concept from the Vedic time and creates a harmony of the universe, which is then extended to our body and mind. We can think of our body as a miniature universe. In these prayers, we ask that our mind be calm, that we see only that which is auspicious and to hear only those things that are noble and helpful to our spiritual life. Let these different organs cooperate in this search for the core of our existence. Let all the senses be helpful in the spiritual quest for our Self. When we are trying to practise contemplation, let all these organs be calm and helpful. Let us feel the body is a friend and not an enemy.

The opposite technique is that of Saint Francis of Assisi who called his body ‘Brother Ass’. In

early Christianity it is said that followers would go to the desert and punish their bodies. In Jainism, also, the followers practised extreme austerity. The Buddha came in contact with the Jains and he followed their practices for six years. Then he said goodbye to them. In his teachings, Lord Buddha said not to go to extremes—not luxury nor austerity. His way was the middle path. We do not find extreme austerity in the Upanishads. The sages say, rather, ‘Let my body be a friend to me. See that these organs do not obstruct my spiritual search.’ After even one-half hour of these contemplations, we will feel calm. When we leave these meditations, we feel a harmony that permeates our whole being. These organs are happy to be our friends and not our enemies.

In this process, we need to feel ourselves as a conscious entity, a conscious principle that is separate from our body. We must remember the verse from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* that tells us not even a pinpoint of matter can be separate from Brahman. Brahman is filling this body from the crown of the head to the tip of the toenail. Atman, consciousness, is permeating every pore of the body. This embodied being is not just material, but is filled with consciousness and consciousness is Brahman.

We are so busy in our little life that we do not have the time nor do we usually have the inclination to find consciousness. Our consciousness is mixed up with prana, the life principle. At this stage, one has to try to be conscious of consciousness and try to feel, ‘I am really a conscious principle.’ We can then scratch our head and say, ‘Yes, I am feeling that consciousness is here. The heart is beating; I am conscious of that.’ Practise being conscious of consciousness. It seems to be something very funny, but it has to be done seriously.

At this stage, one has to feel that consciousness is pervading the whole body. ‘A nasty feeling is coming towards someone I do not like and I

am conscious of that. A friendly feeling is coming towards someone I do like and I am conscious of that. I am conscious all the time, but now I will try to pay special attention. I will make my basic identity with consciousness.’ Usually, we think consciousness is identified with the body. That is why we say, ‘My body, my life.’ Soon, we will find that this body is something outside, just like a table. Our real identity is with consciousness. The body, the organs and the mind are related as consciousness. Through this analysis, we are trying to find our Self.

Each of these practices is helping us toward our goal. Suicide won’t help, nor extreme austerities. Killing or torturing the body will not free us from the body-consciousness. These meditations try to bring us insight so that we can slowly rise above body-consciousness. Finally, the body says, ‘Okay, I give you permission to go to the next wall’. It is really not necessary to have so much body-consciousness. It is a big lie to have so much identity with this body because one day this body will say, ‘Goodbye’.

Later devotional scriptures have developed another technique, which is from the Upanishads. It is essentially the love of God. Devotees of God do not find their body an enemy because the body is helping them to love God. The feet take them to the temple, the hands light and offer the incense, and the eyes see the beautiful image of God. A lover of God tries to establish friendship with this body. ‘You must be a temple and within the heart I will place the image of God.’ The devotee tries to look upon the body as something very holy and sacred; caring for the body is the same as caring for the temple. When eating, the devotee says, ‘I am offering this food to the divine in the temple of my heart.’

With that kind of feeling, our body can no longer be an obstruction to our spiritual life. In this way, we have broken the wall of this first

sheath, the *annamaya kosha* and this body can no longer be an obstruction to our spiritual life. It is possible to break through this body. Even though we are functioning in this body, we do not need to be as a slave to it.

Class 6: The Pranamaya Kosha

The second sheath that covers our true Self is the *pranamaya kosha*, the life force covering, the vital sheath. It is not our true home. We are infinitely more than life, but we identify ourselves with life because we do not want to die.

We have to find out how to overcome the covering of the life force. The ultimate knowledge is that Brahman is everything. When we know that, then there is no such thing as the delusion of maya. Really speaking, this body is nothing but consciousness.

But what if we begin to adore this body as Brahman? Then it would be like the gods Indra and Prajapati and the *asuras*, demonic creatures, in the *Cbhandogya Upanishad*. The asuras misunderstood their teacher, got the wrong idea, and mistakenly practised that their material body was God. This error, their narcissism, led them astray. Know that bodily beauty comes from Brahman. Rethinking and retraining of the mind is necessary. The body asserts itself and does not want to be left behind. The devotee thinks of the body as the temple of Brahman, thus spiritualising the body.

For the knower of the Self, this whole universe is nothing but consciousness. Everything—past, present, and future—is consciousness. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* prescribes these meditations in order to rise above the coverings of the Self.

One meditation is to look upon the *pranamaya kosha*, the life force covering, as the object of meditation. That means to imagine that the prana is really God. Currently, we look upon our prana as just what is within this body, our

breathing and other vital processes. But this prana is not such a small, limited thing. There is a cosmic life animating everything. The same life principle is everywhere. We must identify ourselves with the cosmic life of all living beings, cosmic prana. Be one with all breathing things. Feel we are all breathing in unison.

The Upanishad tells us to look upon the *real* prana, to expand our consciousness of the life force. We have to separate the body *kosha*, the physical sheath, from the prana or vital sheath. Our ideas are mixed up. We have to concentrate and separate them. When we can do that, they lose their power over us and cannot bind us.

From our text, a summary of the original Sanskrit is given: ‘Different from the physical sheath is the vital sheath. This is encased in the physical sheath and has the same form. Through this the senses perform their office. From this men and beasts derive their life. This determines the length of life of all creatures. He who worships the vital sheath as Brahman lives to complete his span of life. This sheath is the living self of the physical sheath.’²

‘Through this the senses perform their office.’ It is prana that is supporting all the senses. Prana is necessary for us to see and to hear. ‘From this men and beasts derive their lives.’ There is a cosmic prana and each living creature has its individual prana. ‘This determines the length of life of all creatures.’ The prana is not always going to stay here. When the prana leaves the body, then we burn that body or bury it. Prana is such a wonderful power, so adore that life force. Adore that prana as Brahman. Meditate on this vital life force as a kind of deity. This meditation is prescribed: ‘He who worships the vital sheath as Brahman lives to complete his span of life.’

When we adore something, even a little pebble on the beach, we say, ‘Oh, you beautiful little pebble.’ The pebble will respond and say, ‘Love

me, pick me up, take me to your home.' The text continues: 'This sheath is the living self of the physical sheath.' The physical sheath, the *anna-maya kosha*, adores the life force because without it the physical sheath is nothing. Prana is the self of the physical sheath. In different Upanishads, meditations are given so that we can rise above the prana-consciousness. Our identification with the body is strong, but we love the vital sheath more because we do not like to think of ourselves as a dead body. Vedantic analysis is necessary to separate the prana from the body.

Just as one technique to rise above the body-consciousness is to watch the body, in the same way we must be conscious of the prana. This needs leisure. This needs time. It is a spiritual practice. When sitting quietly, try to think of the prana as separate. A bit of physiology and anatomy will be a wonderful help in this meditation. We can visualise all the little air sacs in the lungs exchanging oxygen as we inhale and exhale. In our mind, we watch this wonderful drama going on in the body. We must watch this prana, feel the presence of this prana in our body, and it is beautiful. The pictures we see in the anatomy books are here within this body. Imagine the energy that is the blood circulation, the blood cells are absorbing oxygen with the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. When we watch these processes, we are not identifying with the prana. Our attachment to the life force becomes more and more impersonal and we admire dispassionately, just as when we gaze at the sky and the stars. This technique is helpful. By simply watching this prana it will begin to slow down and become more harmonised.

Another technique is to meditate on the cosmic prana. Just as with the meditation on our body where we try to see the body as a piece of the whole earth, we have to realise this little prana in our body is one with the cosmic prana,

the *vishvaprana*. If we take an early morning walk, we will see that prana is in the cat, in the vines, in the birds. Each little body is enjoying prana and is sustained by prana. This little prana in our body is one with *vishvaprana*, the cosmic prana. This will expand our consciousness and bring detachment from our little prana. The irrational clinging to life is clinging to this prana. We try to hold it. We say, 'I won't let you go!' Meditate on this cosmic prana. A feeling of compassion and unity with all life will come, as correspondently the attachment we feel with our little body will go. We want to reach the goal of the Self, so we must not fall in love with things which are not our own. Slowly we have to rise above all attachments.

In our individual meditations on prana, we try to feel the presence of our prana concentrated on the life principle that is operating in our hand, our head, and our heart. This brings the consciousness of prana and the control of prana. We feel we are different from prana. We are the conscious principle within.

In this way we get a feeling of separateness from prana. When we are at our death we will not be so attached to our prana. By these techniques we are trying to rise above the torture and grip of prana. We should feel that we are the masters of prana. We have to be free from prana. Normally we are not even aware of prana. So we must tell our prana, 'You are not the master. Prana is everywhere.' We will keep the prana as our slave. This helps us to bring detachment from prana.

(To be continued)

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BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Rishi


RISHI IS a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The word 'rishi' means sage, but it is necessary to see the origins of this word. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word 'rishi' has been derived from the root *rish*, which means to flow, flow quickly, glide, move with a quick motion, go, move, push, thrust, stab, or kill. The sense of going has to be taken in the context of the word 'rishi'. A suffix is added to the root *rish* following the *unadi* sutra, '*Igupadhat kit*; if the penultimate letter of a verb is an *ik* letter, then the suffix *kit* will be added.' The *t* and *i* of the suffix get dropped. The word *rish* becomes 'rishi', which means a person, who has attained all that is worth attaining. A rishi attains knowledge of the Self, using a mantra and also authors a mantra. A rishi sees the truth everywhere and crosses the transmigratory cycle

of repeated births and deaths called the *samsara*. 'Rishi' also denotes a person, who has attained mastery in a field of knowledge. The word 'rishi' could also mean the author of any scripture. Any person expert in any subject is

also called a 'rishi'. This word denotes a person, who speaks only the truth. A 'rishi' is also one, who has curse as one's weapon.

The word 'rishi' denotes a person, who has seen a mantra. Though, generally seeing a mantra means realising the essence of a mantra, there are accounts of rishis even physically seeing mantras. There are seven kinds of rishis: *maharishi*, *paramarishi*, *devarishi*, *brahmarishi*, *shrutarishi*, *rajarishi*, and *kandarishi*. There are seven rishis, who form a group, and those belonging to this group change in every *manvantara*, aeon. The word 'rishi' can also denote the Vedas. It can also mean rays of light. The meaning of going of the root word *rish* can give the meaning of a person engaged in practising truthfulness, austerities, and trying to attain knowledge. A person who has the qualities of truthfulness, knowledge, scriptural studies, and austerities can be called a 'rishi'. One, who leads a life of renunciation and seeks Self-knowledge, can be also called a 'rishi'. A 'rishi' is one who is moving towards the Supreme.

The Vedas contain numerous references to women rishis. In the Rig Veda, more than twenty-five women rishis are mentioned. 'Rishi' can thus mean any of the many rishis talked of in the Vedas, Puranas, and other texts. A child of a rishi cannot automatically become a rishi by birth, but can become a rishi only by performing austerities. Rishis might live for hundreds or thousands of years. They can dwell in any world they wish. An advent of a rishi is preceded by the birth of many sincere spiritual aspirants. 



TRADITIONAL TALES

The Miracle That Brought Faith

(Continued from the previous issue)

SUDDENLY, the singing of the names of the Lord began. That disturbed the thought currents of the robber. The crowd of devotees starting coming out of the house after receiving prasad.

The robber was waiting for the pandit. The pandit received many special gifts and came out alone on his way to the house that had been specially arranged for him. The robber followed him. The pandit started walking on a path densely surrounded by trees. At that time the robber called out to him in a harsh and severe voice: 'O pandit! Stop! Do not take a step more!' The pandit had some money that he had received just then as a gift. Caught alone by the robber, his hands and feet started trembling and he started to run. Seeing this, the robber roared: 'O pandit! Do not run! Do you think you could escape by running?' The pandit was half dead by now. With no other recourse, he stood motionless like a tree.

The robber approached the pandit and threatened him: 'O pandit! Where is the house of the boys, who you said are wearing ornaments costing millions? In which forest do they graze their cattle? Tell me everything now without hiding anything. If you hide anything, this knife that I am holding will bring out your entrails! Beware!' The pandit looked at the robber. He understood that though the robber appeared like a demon, he was a crystallised idiot. Hence, he gathered some courage and asked the robber: 'What business do you have with those boys?' 'There is some business, there is!,' thundered the

robber. 'Now, tell me what business would that be?', asked the pandit.

The robber replied: 'O pandit! I am a hardened robber. I am going to rob the ornaments of those boys. If I get my hand on those ornaments, I will give you too a share of them. But, if you try to fool me, I would not talk then; my knife will do all the talking! Careful!'

The pandit thought it was easy to be free from this dimwit and said: 'I do not have any objection to that. I will gladly tell you all I know. However, the book that contains all the details that you ask for, is in my house. If you come with me to my house, I can tell you all the details, reading from the book.' He took the robber to his house. Reaching his house, the pandit did not tell anything to the others. He opened his book and started describing the wonderful external beauty of Sri Krishna, Balarama, and others: 'Sri Krishna and Balarama were wearing golden bracelets in their feet. The clanging sound of those bracelets entranced the hearts of those who heard it. The blue-complexioned Sri Krishna was wearing a yellow dress. The golden-complexioned Balarama was wearing a blue dress. Both were wearing waistband jewellery. The precious gems, pearls, sapphire, emerald, ruby, and diamonds affixed on those waistbands made the waistbands glow like fire. Not only that, they were wearing necklaces of *navaratnas*, nine kinds of precious gems, which were dazzling with brightness. Their chests were adorned with the great lustre of the *kaustubha* gem, which was unparalleled and no match could be found in the

entire world. Their wrists had bracelets studded with *navaratnas*. Their eyes were decked with rings of precious gems. Their heads were fit with crowns aving crest-jewels, which were shedding their lustre all over.

‘Sri Krishna had beautiful black and curly hair, a vermillion mark on his forehead, and his lips carried a divine smile. Sri Krishna was holding a flute with his beautiful hands. The flute was being touched by his beautiful lips. Millions of suns were robbed of their brightness in front of the radiance of Sri Krishna’s divine body. His neck was beautified by multi-coloured flower garlands. His sharp nose was bent a bit like that of a parrot. His teeth were bright like jasmine buds. How can one describe his unsurpassed beauty? If Sri Krishna starts calling only “Radha, Radha, Radha” by playing his flute, even yogis immersed in samadhi, thousands of miles away in caves, come out of samadhi, and come running to listen to that divine tune! He can be seen under the shade of a fig tree in Vrindavan, on the bank of River Yamuna. Both Sri Krishna and Balarama will be found there together.’ Thus the pandit expounded the Bhagavata to the robber.

The robber interjected: ‘Very good,

O pandit! How much money would all these ornaments be worth?’

Pandit: ‘Oh, they will fetch you many millions. It will get you an inestimable amount of millions and millions. For instance, just take the case of the *kaustubha* gem. All the wealth of the world would not make up for the value of that gem.’

Robber: ‘Wow! Please tell me sir, how does the *kaustubha* gem look like?’

Pandit: ‘Wherever that gem is kept, there shines a radiance like that of the sun. There is no darkness there. Such a gem cannot be found anywhere else in the world.’

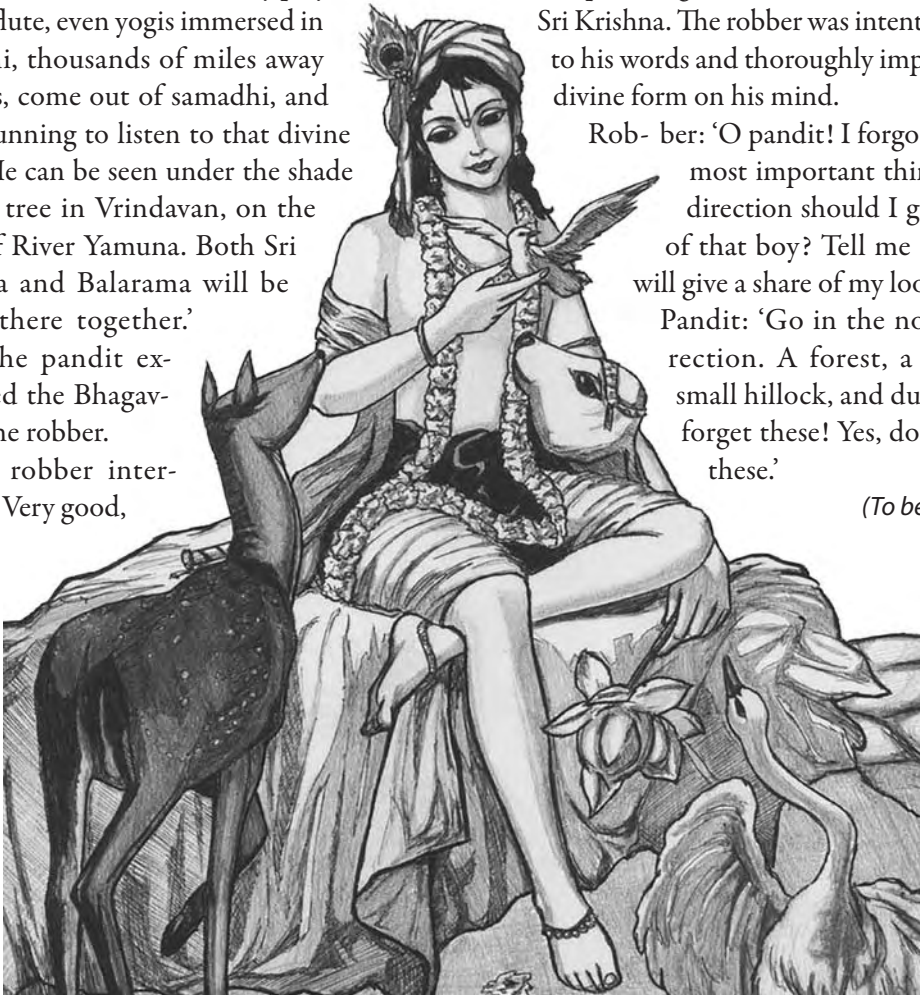
Robber: ‘Then, it would definitely be very costly. Alright, please tell me everything again in detail. I will impress everything on my mind.’

The pandit again described the divine form of Sri Krishna. The robber was intently listening to his words and thoroughly impressed that divine form on his mind.

Rob-ber: ‘O pandit! I forgot to ask the most important thing! Which direction should I go in search of that boy? Tell me this first. I will give a share of my loot.’

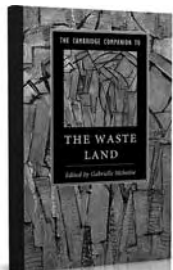
Pandit: ‘Go in the northern direction. A forest, a fig tree, a small hillock, and dusk. Do not forget these! Yes, do not forget these.’

(To be continued)



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land

Edited by Gabrielle McIntire

Cambridge University Press, University Printing House, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, UK. 2015. 254 pp. £19.99. PB. ISBN 9781107672574.

The latest *Cambridge Companion* series, unfortunately, is the new cram book series for the unsuspecting literature scholar. They are longer and sophisticated jargon-filled ‘Cliff-Notes’ or ‘York-Notes’ of yore. While the ‘York-Notes’ make sense, these new *Companions* cater to those who seek to be ‘bookful blockhead, ignorantly read’ (Alexander Pope, *The Bookful Blockhead*).

For example, *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) has a chapter on evil in McCarthy’s novels which is a hotchpotch of everything except the real issue at hand; that is, evil. There one misses the nuanced theodicy to be found in McCarthy’s corpus which includes Buddhist theodicy (See Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (New York: Vintage, 1993)). At the end of the *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, we only have meandering nothings. *The Waste Land* suffers the same fate in the hands of Gabriel McIntire’s edited volume. One is left bewildered after reading this dense volume.

It is easy to contribute snappy chapters to pricey books than to meditate on the hard questions that truly matter regarding any author. For example, it is easier to write ‘Many have called T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* the greatest poem in English of the twentieth century. In its particular historical moment of 1922 the poem articulated and helped to define both an epistemology and an ontology—a new way of thinking and being during an era’ (1). What do ‘epistemology’ and ‘ontology’ mean here? In their chapter titled ‘Popular Culture’ David E Chinitz and Julia E Daniel

write that Eliot’s ‘presentation of mechanized or mass-produced *objects*, and the cultural habits they enable, is mostly apprehensive, especially when they replace an earlier artisanal form or induce dissociation, whether between man and woman, person and place, or senses and self’ (75). How can one truly understand the mass production of *objects*, and in this instance, of fortune-telling if one pretends to be a neo-structuralist without understanding Theodor W Adorno? But to accept that Eliot’s approach to fortune-telling was merely one of scepticism, one must also pretend that Eliot was not a theist whose dualism categorically demarcated between the Kantian imperatives of the good and the bad. The book under review refers to arcana and instead of being a sourcebook for authoritative exegesis is an archive of below-par exegetes who, one suspects, will use their apparent upgraded credentials through citations et al in this book for credential fetish.

Eve Sorum is neither a psychoanalyst, nor a psychologist, nor a philosopher but she has tread where angels would fear to tread—in a few pages of her chapter entitled ‘Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and New Subjectivities’, she tries being all the aforementioned domain-experts at once, forgetting that her core training is that of a literary scholar (162–77). For example, she abruptly focuses on one Dr Roger Vittoz (164) through literary sleuthing but since she is not a psychologist, her references end by saying ‘Vittoz roots psychological unity in both physical and mental practices while also emphasizing that repetition can be therapeutic, rather than a sign of repressed neuroses or the working through of a traumatic event’ (165). This one sentence is symptomatic of this collection of essays. None knows which sort of repression she means, nor what kind of repetition she indicates or for that matter, how does one work through a traumatic event? I deduce that Sorum has not heard of Martin Seligman, which is natural since she is

not a psychologist. Therefore, is it not strange that Sorum pontificates on psychology and psychoanalysis in a staccato manner? Seligman nearly two decades ago has discovered and thereby negated deterministic psychoanalytic theories through his work on positive psychology. Sorum and the other contributors to this volume have made a mockery of philosophy, poetry, and other archaeologies of knowledge by writing in ways which are imitative of Martin Heidegger's incomprehensible charlatan's prose. Taking the cue from Sorum who mistakenly applies the word 'porous' to Eliot's philosophical studies, specifically regarding F H Bradley, this reviewer finds this anthology porous, slippery, and haunted by pop-Marxism, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Derrida who would all be turning in their graves were they to read the abuses of their works by eager acolytes today who fixate on citation factors and other empirical indices used by hardcore scientists. Humanities is now only lauded in literature academies if they are only scientific and therefore, reducible to comprehensibility.

Better look for Eliot scholarship elsewhere. Helen Vendler once tried to write a quick-read introduction to T S Eliot; she made the mistake of writing that Eliot's poetry's *Upanishadic* references are *all* Buddhist (See Helen Vendler, *The Waste Land and Other Poems: Including The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* (New York: Signet, 1998)), especially in *The Waste Land*. In this book under review, one does not even know which mistakes to choose and highlight and which to discard since all is folly here.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay,

Psychoanalyst

Assistant Professor of English

Narasinha Dutt College, Howrah



The Inspiration of Paradise Lost

Amal Kiran (K D Sethna)

The Integral Life Foundation, PO Box 239, Waterford, CT, USA. 1994. 186 pp. ₹50. HB.

Indian students studying *Paradise Lost* read C S Lewis and Stanley Fish but not Amal Kiran aka K D Sethna. While studying William Blake they hear of Kathleen Raine but not of Sethna or of Sethna's

correspondence with Raine. It is perverse that they read Graham Hough studying Yeats but not Bhabatosh Chatterjee. Indian scholars of Milton do not understand that *Paradise Lost* should be compared to Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Adhyatma Ramayana* rather than with *Gilgamesh*. Milton was a devout Christian—this is not the same as calling Milton a Puritan, which is a pejorative dismissal of Milton's faith—and the primary response to him should be theological and not through incomprehensible critiques derived from the atheists, which is not the same as being *nastikas*, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, or Julia Kristeva. Evil is very real and exorcisms are real too. The problem of evil is the subject of *Paradise Lost* and Sethna's book interrogates Milton's epic at both levels: that of the literary and that of the religious. Fixating on meaningless etymological gymnastics is also not the way forward in Miltonia in 2018.

There is no place for Sethna within English-literature curricula since Sethna since he is a Hindu. Indian and Indian-origin humanists cannot conceive that anything good can come out of India. Unless one sits at the Bodleian nothing can happen! Digital humanities be darned!

'*Savitri* is in many respects unMiltonic' (114). Yet Sethna through his scholarship proves why Milton and *Savitri* should be studied synoptically as can be seen from the ninth chapter of this book, 'Early Milton and What Paradise Lost Might Have Been: Clues from Early Sri Aurobindo'. The eighth chapter, 'Poetry of the Thought-Mind and "Overheard Poetry"' is an attack by Sri Aurobindo mediated through Sethna showing us how John Donne (99) had more of affect/emotional effect and 'negative capability' than Milton. Unless one studies the seventh and ninth chapters of this book, one will not understand *Paradise Lost*. The failure to understand *Paradise Lost* means not being able to understand either religious or non-religious theodicies. To begin reading Milton is the beginning of becoming a liberal pacifist.

How many students of Milton know that Sri Aurobindo wrote on Milton? The eighth and ninth chapters this book should be studied while earning a bachelors' degree in English; the entire book should be compulsory reading at the Masters' level.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay

MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.
Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

***The Case Against Education:
Why the Education System Is a Waste of
Time and Money***

Bryan Caplan

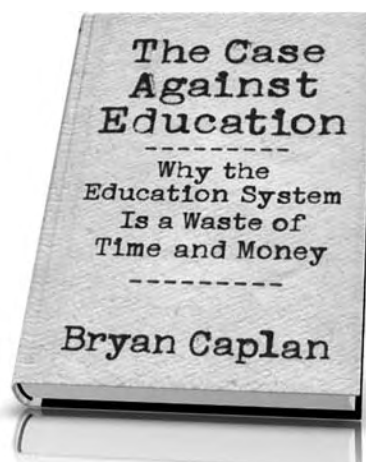
Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. 2018. xiv + 395 pp. \$29.95. HB. ISBN 9780691174655.

MOST CRITICS of our education system complain we aren't spending our money in the right way, or that preachers in teachers' clothing are leading our nation's children down dark paths. While I semi-sympathize, these critics miss what I see as our education system's supreme defect: *there's way too much education*. Typical students burn thousands of hours studying material that neither raises their productivity nor enriches their lives. And of course, students can't waste time without experts to show them how.

Schools obviously teach some broadly useful skills—especially literacy and numeracy. High schools often include a few vocational electives—auto shop, computer programming, woodworking. Most colleges offer some career-oriented majors—engineering, computer science, premed. But what about all other courses? All the other majors?

Education: Private Profit, Social Waste

Does this book advise you to cut your education short? Absolutely not. In the signaling model, studying irrelevancies still raises income by impressing employers. To unilaterally curtail your education is to voluntarily leap into a lower-quality pool of workers. The labor market brands you accordingly.



For a single individual, education pays. On this point, the standard 'education as skill creation' and the 'education as signaling' theories agree. The theories make different predictions, however, about what happens if *average* education levels decline. If education is all skill creation, a fall in average education saps our skills, impoverishing the world. If education is all signaling, however, a fall in average education leaves our skills—and the wealth of the world—unchanged. In fact, cutbacks *enrich* the world by conserving valuable time and resources.

Suppose you agree society would benefit if average education declined. Is this achievable? Verily. Government heavily subsidizes education. In 2011, US federal, state, and local governments spent almost a trillion dollars on it. The simplest way to get less education, then, is to cut the subsidies. This would not eliminate wasteful signaling, but at least government would pour less gasoline on the fire.

The thought of education cuts horrifies most people because 'we all benefit from education'. I maintain their horror rests on what logicians call a *fallacy of composition*—the belief that what is true for a part must also be true for the whole. The classic example: You want a better view at a concert. What can you do? Stand up. Individually, standing works. What happens, though, if

everyone copies you? Can *everyone* see better by standing? No way.

Popular support for education subsidies rests on the same fallacy. The person who gets more education, gets a better job. It works; you see it plainly. Yet it does not follow that if everyone gets more education, everyone gets a better job. In the signaling model, subsidizing everyone's schooling to improve our jobs is like urging everyone to stand up at a concert to improve our views. Both are 'smart for one, dumb for all'.

To be maximally blunt, we would be better off if education were *less affordable*. If subsidies for education were drastically reduced, many could no longer afford the education they now plan to get. If I am correct, however, this is no cause for alarm. It is precisely because education is so affordable that the labor market expects us to possess so much. Without the subsidies, you would no longer *need* the education you can no longer afford.

Ultimately, I believe the best education policy is no education policy at all: the separation of school and state. However, you can buy the substance of my argument without embracing my crazy extremism. You can grant the importance of signaling in education, and still favor substantial government assistance for the industry. If you conclude education is only one-third signaling, your preferred level of government assistance will noticeably fall, but not to zero. At the same time, I do not downplay potentially radical implications. If, like me, you deem education 80% signaling, ending taxpayer support is crazy like a fox. This is especially clear if, as I ultimately argue, the humanistic benefits of education are mostly wishful thinking.


Anyone reading this book has almost certainly spent over a decade in school. You have *vast* firsthand knowledge of the education industry. The unfolding argument takes full advantage of your decade-plus of personal experience.

Please test all claims about the true nature of education against your own abundant educational experience.

This does not mean my contrarian thesis is obvious; far from it. Yet for the most part, the book does not try to change your mind about brute facts. It tries to change your mind about the best way to *interpret* facts you've known for ages. Once you calmly review your experience through my lens, I bet you'll admit I've got a point.

Education is a strange industry, but familiarity masks the strangeness. I want to revive your sense of wonder. Consider the typical high school curriculum. English is the international language of business, but American high school students spend years studying Spanish, or even French. Few jobs require knowledge of higher mathematics, but over 80% of high school grade suffer through geometry. Students study history for years, but history teachers are almost the only people alive who use history on the job. Required coursework is so ill suited to students' needs you have to wonder if your eyes are playing tricks on you.

In part, we accept this strange curriculum as 'normal' because we're used to it. On a deeper level, though, we accept our education system because it 'works'. If you get more school and better grades, employers reward you. What more must you know?

If you're only looking out for number one, nothing. Got to school, get good grades, make more money—the recipe is sound. But if you want to know whether your education system is a good deal for society, or if you're a curious person, the strange stuff students study is a vital clue. So is the fact that employers *pay* students extra for studying strange stuff. Faced with these clues, the orthodox view that students go to school to acquire job skills only shrugs. The signaling model of education uses these clues to detect—and solve—a great neglected social mystery. 

REPORTS

New Mission Sub-Centre

A sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow**, has been started in Ayodhya under the name **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ayodhya** with 379 square metres of land near Saryu River received from a devotee. Its address is: 'Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ayodhya, Bypass Chauraha, Near Saket Petrol Pump, Mohalla: Basudev Ghat, Ayodhya, Dist. Faizabad, UP 224 123'. Construction of the Ashrama building will start shortly.

Values Education and Youth Programmes

Coimbatore Mission Vidyalaya held a three-day residential youths' convention from 1 to 3 December 2017 in which 984 delegates participated.

Delhi centre held nine values education workshops from 1 November to 1 December, which were attended by 540 teachers. The workshops were held in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. On 1 December, the centre distributed 90 LED projectors to the government schools in Ajmer.

Mysuru Ashrama conducted a written quiz competition on Swamiji from July to December in which about 36,500 students from 360 schools and colleges in Karnataka took part. State level toppers were awarded prizes on 30 December.

Salem Ashrama conducted three values education programmes at three colleges in Salem district in December which were attended by 629 students in all.

National Youth Day Celebrations

The following centres and the Headquarters, along with Saradapitha, celebrated National Youth Day, 12 January 2018, with great

enthusiasm, holding various programmes such as processions, youths' conventions, speeches and cultural competitions: Aalo, Agartala, Allahabad, Almora, Antpur, Asansol, Aurangabad, Baghbazar, Bankura, Baranagar Mission, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Chapra, Chengalpattu, Chennai Math, Chennai Mission Ashrama, Chennai Students' Home, Coimbatore Math, Coimbatore Mission, Contai, Cooch Behar, Dehradun, Delhi, Deoghar, Gadadhar Ashrama, Gol Park, Gurap, Guwahati, Halasuru, Hatamuniguda, Hyderabad, Itanagar, Jalpaiguri, Jammu, Jamshedpur, Jamtara, Jayrambati, Jhargram, Kadapa, Kailashahar, Kalady, Kamarpukur, Kanchipuram, Kankurgachhi, Kanpur, Katihar, Kochi, Koyilandy, Lalgah, Limbdi, Lucknow, Madurai, Malda, Manasadwip, Mangaluru, Medinipur, Mekhliganj, Mumbai, Muzaffarpur, Mysuru, Nagpur, Naora, Narainpur, Narendrapur, Narottam Nagar, Nattarampalli, Pala, Patna, Ponnampet, Porbandar, Port Blair, Pune, Puri Mission, Purulia along with Bagda, Rahara, Raipur, Rajamahendravaram, Rajkot, Ramanathapuram, Ramharipur, Ranchi Morabadi, Sargachhi, Sarisha, Seva Pratishthan, Shillong, Sikra-Kulingram, Silchar, Swamiji's Ancestral House, Tamluk, Thrissur, Tirupati, Tiruvalla, Vadodara, Varanasi Home of Service, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, and Vrindaban.

Sri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of Tripura, and several other dignitaries addressed the meeting held by Agartala centre on 12 January.

Sri Padmanabha B Acharya, Governor of Nagaland, inaugurated the youths' convention held at Mangaluru Ashrama on 13 January. About 750 youths participated in the convention.

Sri Ganga Prasad, Governor of Meghalaya, among others, addressed the meeting conducted by Shillong centre on 12 January.

Cultural competitions held by the following centres as part of National Youth Day celebrations deserve special mention with the number of students participated: Aurangabad: About 5,000 college students; Jamshedpur: Nearly 1,000 students from 22 schools; Madurai: 15,552 students from 205 schools and colleges; Mumbai: 7,297 students from 165 schools and 10 colleges; Muzaffarpur: 5,148 students from 50 schools and colleges; Nagpur: 3,941 students from 50 schools; Rajkot: About 9,000 students; Vadodara: 82,291 students from 932 high schools in Gujarat.


News of Branch Centres

Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, consecrated the newly built Sri Ramakrishna Temple at **Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Jessore, Bangladesh**, on 28 November, the sacred birthday of Swami Premanandaji Maharaj. Special worship, procession, cultural events and five public meetings were held as part of the three-day programme from 27 to 29 November 2017. Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Mr Biren Sikder, Minister of Home Affairs Mr Asaduzzaman Khan, State Minister of Ministry of Public Administration Ms Ismat Ara Sadique, several other dignitaries and 87 monastics took part in the celebrations. About 30,000 devotees visited the new temple on the day of the consecration.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh, conducted a seminar on values-oriented education on 2 December in which Minister of Home Affairs Mr Asaduzzaman Khan, Government of Bangladesh,

and some other distinguished people addressed a gathering of about 750 people.

Relief

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items, as shown against their names, to needy people: **India: Baghbazar:** 1,974 saris, 870 dhotis, 380 uttaris, 82 chaddars, 2,085 shirts, 2,512 trousers, 365 pairs of socks, 40 salwar-kameez, 47 frocks, 180 belts, and 100 wallets from 14 April to 17 December 2017. **Indore:** 50 shirts and 50 trousers on 19 November. **Jalpaiguri:** 251 saris and 972 dhotis from 22 November to 27 December. **Jayrambati:** 4,428 shirts and 4,324 trousers from 7 to 20 November. **Kalady:** 350 shirts, 350 trousers, 150 salwar-kameez, and 350 pairs of socks on 13 December. **Karimganj:** 150 saris, 30 dhotis, and 240 mosquito-nets from 10 May to 24 December. **Koyilandy:** 215 kg rice and 1,802 notebooks on 17 December. **Mysuru:** 1,947 shirts, 2,983 trousers, and 1,147 T-shirts from 6 September to 10 December. **Naora:** 1,000 saris, 1,000 dhotis, and 464 assorted garments from 19 to 25 October. **Narottam Nagar:** 345 shirts, 345 trousers, 172 tops, and 194 assorted garments on 26 and 27 December. **Rahara:** 73 saris, 9 chaddars, 37 dhotis, 4 lungis, 249 mosquito-nets, 120 bedsheets, 5 kg baby food, and 31 plates on 14 December. **Rajamahendravaram:** 175 saris, 75 dhotis, 50 towels, 400 kg rice, 80 kg dal, 80 kg edible oil, 40 kg sugar, and 40 kg tamarind on 10 and 15 December. **Sikra Kuligram:** 152 saris and 15 chaddars from 14 to 18 September. **Taki:** 2,236 shirts, 2,204 trousers, and 1,003 tops from 12 to 14 December. **Vrindaban:** 1,600 dhotis, 320 litres mustard oil, 1,600 pairs of socks, and 3,200 bars of bathing soap on 9 December. **Bangladesh: Dhaka:** 15 utensil sets, each set containing a plate, a bowl, a tumbler, a jug, a spoon, a mug, a pan, a bucket, and a winnowing basket, on 19 and 20 December. 

Appeal for Human Excellence

“They alone live, who live for others” — Swami Vivekananda.

Friends and Devotees,

Situated in the mystical foothills and natural greenery and beauty of the sub Himalayan range, in 1928, some inspired devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda started a new Ashrama in Jalpaiguri. In 1941, the center was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math 1941 as a branch centre. In addition to serving as an abode for spiritual sadhakas, this Ashrama has been engaging itself in different philanthropic activities, including a Students Home, Value Education, Integrated Child Development project, Charitable Dispensary, Library and Reading Room, Relief and Welfare Works and others.



We humbly appeal for your generous contribution towards the construction of Vivekananda Sabha Griha (depicted above), a multipurpose hall (resembling the historic Art Institute of Chicago of 1893) with the revised estimated cost about Rs.4.66 Crores, having an area of 16,000 sq. ft with a seating capacity of more than 1300 persons. It will serve as a convention hall for students, youth, and the general public, living in

the remote areas of North Bengal, to inspire human excellence, culture, philanthropy, spirituality, and most importantly national unity.

We also wish to inform that if any donor wishes to perpetuate the memory of his/her loving one, he/she may do so by contributing an appropriate amount. We would honour the donor's desire by displaying a suitable plaque to honour the deceased. Interested donors are requested to make inquiries in this regard to the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ashramapara, Mission Road, Jalpaiguri-735101, West Bengal, India.

Donations may be contributed either through A/C payee cheque / draft, or money order that will be thankfully accepted and acknowledged. Cheques / drafts may kindly be drawn in favour of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Jalpaiguri.

The contributions are eligible for deduction u/s 80-G of the Income Tax Act 1961.

Payment may be made by Bank Transfer (within INDIA)

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Please inform us immediately after online transfer, your name, full postal address, PAN No and the amount donated by email to rkmajal@gmail.com

Your contribution will go a long way in ensuring timely completion of this noble project.

May Sri Ramakrishna shower his blessings on all your endeavour is our sincere prayer.

Jalpaiguri

9th December, 2017

Yours in the service of the Lord,

**Swami Shivapremananda,
Secretary**



Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama

(A branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah: 711002)

Mission Road, Ashramapara, Jalpaiguri: 735101

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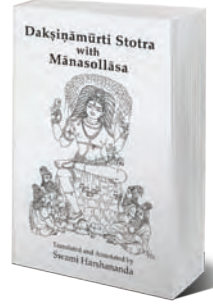
Dakshinamurti Stotra with Manasollasa

Swami Harshananda

In the Indian hymnal literature, the stotras of Sri Shankaracharya occupy a unique place. They are charmingly simple, and yet, simply charming. The panegyric material of the hymns often alternates with the moral principles or spiritual values.

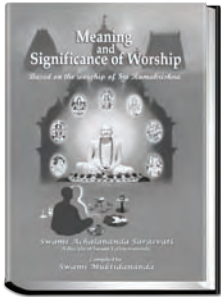
In a few rare hymns, Sri Shankaracharya has introduced masterly condensations of the doctrines of Advaita Vedanta. And, Dakshinamurti Stotra is a masterpiece among them, combining in itself poetical elegance as well as metaphysical brilliance. Sureshvara has written a varttika on this stotra called Manasollasa, 'that which exhilarates the mind'.

In this book, Revered Swami Harshananda Maharaj, a senior scholar-monk of the Ramakrishna Order, has translated into English this Dakshinamurti Stotra and Manasollasa, with lucid annotations.



Pages 248

Price ₹ 145



Pages 344

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Meaning and Significance of Worship

(Based on the worship of Sri Ramakrishna)

Swami Achalananda Sarasvati

This book deals with the meaning and significance of worship of Sri Ramakrishna. It contains the mantras in Sanskrit, roman transliteration, word-by-word meanings, and English translations, with detailed descriptions and insightful explanations of the procedures followed.

Compiling the meanings and explanations of Swami Achalananda Sarasvati, a disciple of Revered Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj and a Sanskrit scholar well-versed in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, Swami Muktidananda has shaped the material in form of this book, with pictures and summary charts.

The present edition in new layout is further enriched with additional material and pictures.

This book is a must for all devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, especially those who perform his worship.



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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

Swami Vivekananda



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THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION

Swami Vireswarananda

The advent of Sri Ramakrishna, in the perspective of world history, has thrown open the floodgate of a spiritual force of unprecedented magnitude. To harness this



energy and direct it for the good of humanity, Sri Ramakrishna had gathered round him a few chosen and dedicated disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda who were to prepare the channel through which would flow this new energy. This was necessary not only for the regeneration of India but for countering the materialistic outlook which had engulfed the whole world. Swami Vivekananda founded the twin organizations, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission at different

times after the passing away of his Master in 1886. The great Swamiji made these two organizations the vehicle and medium for giving practical shape to his Master's teachings. On his return from the West in 1897 the Swami formulated for the monks of the Ramakrishna Order the true significance of the monk's life in one pithy sentence, "For one's own liberation and for the good of the world". He admonished them to give up the selfish idea of leading the life of a recluse and to dedicate themselves to the service of others, to see God in the sick, the poor, and the ignorant and render service, as worship, to this God in man. With this angle of vision, he asked them to distribute spiritual, intellectual and material food, according to the needs of the sufferer. The stress was on God realization. Such a sadhana or spiritual practice was presented as on a par with the traditional disciplines. Social service was, as it were, a by-product of this divine worship. The Swami's message, therefore, cannot be evaluated, in terms of philanthropy or social service, for fundamentally it was a spiritual one. This service to man, seeing the God in him, is the Swami's greatest gift to the modern world of strife, competition and war.

When framing rules for the guidance of the Headquarters of the organization, Swami Vivekananda observed, "This Bharat will again be awake. And the huge wave which has originated from this centre will, like a great inundation, envelop the whole of mankind and carry it towards the gate of emancipation. This is our faith and we have girded up our loins for achieving this through successive generations of our disciples."

[Compiled from the "Souvenir of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Convention 1980", Belur Math, December 1980, page 1 and "A Bridge to Eternity", Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, First Edition, 1986 pages 491-494]

In reverential homage:

Bani, Bhaskar, Debasree, Devajit & Ruchira Roy, (Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi)

The First Monastery of Ramakrishna Order - Baranagar Math

An Appeal



Dear Friend,

Ramakrishna Math, Baranagar (erstwhile Baranagar Math), the first monastery of Ramakrishna Sangha, was founded by Swami Vivekananda after Sri Ramakrishna Deva's mahasamadhi in 1886. Believed to be a haven for ghosts, the old decrepit building was taken on rent and it lasted for 5 years (approx.). This legendary monastery witnessed the amazing lives led by the tyagi disciples of Sri Ramakrishna Deva in deep *tapasya* and meditation overcoming penury and privation. It was here they took *sannyasa* and shaped their lives to carry forward the Master's *bhava* and message to the world at large. Ultimately, Baranagar Math receded into the ruins of history, to be resurrected again in 2004 as a branch centre of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

Among its various activities, this centre has been running a non-formal primary school catering to the poor slum dwelling children of this age-old locality. However, the present old school building has become utterly worn out and incapable of providing adequate space for the increasing number of students. Hence, it has been decided to build a new 5-storied building on a near-by own plot of land (although our present target is up to the second floor). It will house our school Gadadhar Sishu Vikas Kendra and Charitable Allopathic and Homeopathic Dispensary. However, the probable cost of construction has been estimated as under: -

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| (a) Cost of construction of foundation up to the Plinth Level | - Rs. 20,00,000.00 (approx.) |
| (b) Cost of construction of Ground Floor | - Rs. 64,00,000.00 (approx.) |
| (c) Cost of construction of First Floor | - Rs. 66,00,000.00 (approx.) |
| (d) Cost of construction of Second Floor | - Rs. 67,00,000.00 (approx.) |
| Aggregate Cost | - <u>Rs.2,17,00,000.00</u> |

Candidly speaking, we are quite unable to bear the huge cost of construction as shown above. Hence, we fervently appeal to the devotees, patrons and well-wishers in India and abroad, to come forward with a helping hand to donate generously to our 'School-cum-Medical Service Building Fund'. We believe, without your kind help and co-operation, the dream project will ever remain unfulfilled.

Your donation may kindly be made by cheque drawn in the name of 'Ramakrishna Math, Baranagar' and sent to 125/1, Pramanick Ghat Road, Kolkata - 700 036 or by NEFT/RTGS to our HDFC Bank, Cossipore Branch, 67, Cossipore Road, Kolkata - 700 036 (IFS Code HDFC0004481) Savings Bank Account No. 50100196928813. All such donations are eligible for exemption under 80G of Income Tax Act. Kindly visit at www.rkmbaranagar.org. to know more about us.

With thanks and *namaskar*,

Yours in the Lord,
Swami Vamanananda
Adhyaksha

The best guide in life is strength.
In religion, as in all other matters,
discard everything that weakens
you, have nothing to do with it.
—Swami Vivekananda

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